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# Using Reappraisal to Regulate Negative Emotion After the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: Does Emotion Regulation Trump Political Action?

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Political action (volunteering, protesting) is central to functioning democracies, and action is often motivated by negative emotion. However, theories of emotion regulation suggest that people often strive to decrease such negative emotions. Thus, effective emotion regulation (e.g., reappraisal)—while helping people feel better—could have the unintended consequence of hindering political action. We tested this hypothesis in Clinton voters after the 2016 U.S. election ( $N_{total} = 1552$ ). Studies 1a (conducted November 2016) and 1b (conducted November 2016, with a follow-up in January 2017) assessed individuals' recent use of reappraisal in managing emotions evoked by the election. Studies 2a and 2b (conducted March 2017) exposed individuals to Trump-focused news footage and assessed individuals' reappraisal during the clip and subsequent emotional responses. Studies 3a and 3b (conducted June 2017) experimentally manipulated reappraisal and measured subsequent emotional responses to Trump-focused news footage. Each study assessed recent or intended political action. In Studies 1a and 1b, we found that reappraisal predicted *lower* political action; in Studies 2a and 2b we observed an indirect effect such that reappraisal predicted lower negative emotion which in turn accounted for lower intentions to engage in political action; and Studies 3a and 3b provided experimental evidence for this indirect effect. These results suggest that effective emotion regulation like reappraisal may be beneficial in the short-run by helping restore emotional well-being after upsetting political events but may also be costly in the long-run by reducing the potential for productive political action.

*Keywords:* emotion, emotion regulation, political psychology

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Political action—volunteering, protesting, donating, contacting representatives—is integral to democratic societies because it gives voice to those suffering injustices and grievances, provides an outlet for those dissatisfied with the status quo, and keeps in check those with power (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013;

van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). Because political action plays such an important role within our democracies, researchers from various disciplines (e.g., sociology, political science, and psychology) have sought to understand the factors that mobilize people to take action and the factors that prevent them from doing so (Jost, Becker, Osborne, & Badaan, 2017; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

Scholars of political action have pointed to negative emotion as a key predictor of political engagement (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007; Tausch et al., 2011). In general, this research indicates that the stronger an individual's negative emotional response to an upsetting political event, the more likely that person is to take action.

However, in spite of these possible motivational benefits of negative emotions, research from the emotion regulation tradition is predicated on the notion that people commonly aim to decrease their experience of negative emotions and thus restore their emotional well-being when faced with upsetting events (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). This raises the possibility that successfully using emotion regulation—while helping individuals feel better in the moment—might inhibit instrumental political action in the long run.

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Emotion regulation research has identified a number of strategies that individuals may use to manage their emotional states (Gross, 1998). Here we focus on cognitive reappraisal as a commonly used and widely studied strategy that effectively reduces negative emotions (Gross & John, 2003; John & Gross, 2004; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012). Reappraisal involves changing the way one thinks about a situation, for example, by reframing the situation as less dire than originally thought or as having unexpected benefits. Given that reappraisal can effectively reduce negative emotion, using reappraisal may create a trade-off between individually feeling better and engaging in political action. Specifically, we hypothesized that reappraisal may reduce individuals' engagement in political action, in part because it leads to reduced negative emotional responses to upsetting political events (see Figure 1 for a depiction of the present hypotheses). Next, we review the literature on emotion and political action, which will lay the groundwork for examining the role of emotion regulation in political action.

### The Role of Emotion in Political Action

Political action occurs when individuals, as group members, engage in any action to achieve group goals in a political context (van Zomeren, 2016). Political action comes in many forms, from posting one's support for political policies on social media, to volunteering for a political campaign, to taking to the streets in protest of injustice. Yet, all these actions have a common motivation: a desire to impact society (see van Zomeren, 2016; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Various historical examples attest to the power of political action when waged by everyday people: By dumping tea into Boston Harbor, disgruntled colonists initiated the birth of a new nation; By challenging the moral and legal basis of slavery, abolitionists around the world were able to liberate millions; By banding together and speaking out, women in America attained the right to vote.

Scholars have explored various predictors of what moves individuals to such action (see van Zomeren et al., 2008, for a review), and have found negative emotions to be a key predictor. Research has repeatedly found that when individuals observe political injustices, they experience strong negative emotion, which in turn increases mobilization (Goodwin et al., 2000; Iyer et al., 2007; Klandermans, Van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008; Miller, Cronin, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009; Shi, Hao, Saeri, & Cui, 2015). In fact, meta-analytic evidence indicates that such negative

emotion is typically a stronger predictor of political action than nonemotion based predictors (e.g., cognitive perceptions of injustice; van Zomeren et al., 2008). This research is consistent with functional accounts of emotion, which propose that emotions—even negative ones—help us respond adaptively to our environment (Frijda, 1988).

Demonstrating the pervasive influence of negative emotion on action, studies have observed this link across many different types of political action (e.g., Gerber, Green, & Larimer, 2008; Groenendyk & Banks, 2014; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). For example, in a laboratory study, greater negative emotional responses to injustice increased the likelihood that individuals would sign a petition calling for changes to ameliorate that injustice (Miller et al., 2009). Additionally, in field studies, greater negative emotion has been linked with more frequent engagement in political discussions, greater willingness to display campaign buttons or stickers, and greater likelihood of attending rallies, donating time or money, or even working for a political party or candidate (Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011; Weber, 2013). Although this work has often examined the motivational nature of anger, research has also found that other forms of negative emotion—including fear and sadness—can promote political action as well (e.g., Groenendyk & Banks, 2014; Valentino et al., 2011).

### The Role of Emotion Regulation in Political Action

In contrast to the literature examining emotion and political action—which concludes that negative emotion is beneficial (and perhaps even necessary) to key forms of political action—the literature examining emotion regulation has often assumed it is beneficial to *avoid* negative emotion. Reappraisal, in particular, has been considered a highly adaptive 'gold standard' emotion regulation strategy that can effectively reduce negative emotion (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Webb et al., 2012). Empirically, reappraisal has been shown to have many benefits not only when considering affective outcomes, but also when considering cognitive, physiological, and social outcomes (Appleton, Buka, Loucks, Gilman, & Kubzansky, 2013; Gross & John, 2003; Richards & Gross, 2000). In spite of the wide-spread benefits of reappraisal, however, there are theoretical reasons to predict that reappraisal may also have unintended negative consequences under particular circumstances.

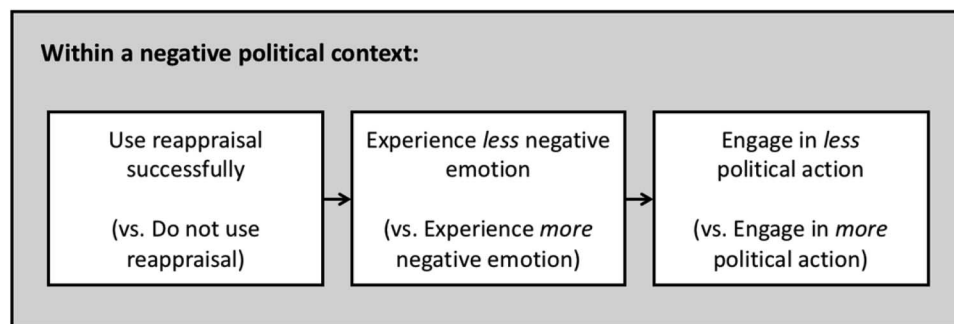


Figure 1. A trade-off between feeling better in the short-term and engaging in longer-term political action.

Recent theoretical models of emotion regulation have emphasized that the longer-term outcomes of any strategy—including reappraisal—should depend on the context in which that strategy is used (Aldao, Sheppes, & Gross, 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). One core example of this more contextualized account of emotion regulation hinges on the motivational value of negative emotion: When faced with a context that can benefit from the motivation provided by negative emotion, there may be an important trade-off between engaging in emotion regulation to feel better and engaging in action to change the context itself (Lazarus, 1993). We propose that this trade-off may be particularly salient within the context of political action. This approach is consistent with recent theoretical models of emotion regulation that are geared toward understanding group-based phenomena like political action (see Goldenberg, Halperin, van Zomeren, & Gross, 2016). Within political contexts—where individuals' group membership crucially shapes the individuals' emotions—an individual can experience a conflict when their personal hedonic motive (e.g., to feel better) is inconsistent their group's instrumental motive (e.g., to take collective action). We propose that individuals who successfully use reappraisal within politically charged contexts may feel better in the short run, but may also be less likely to engage in political action as a consequence (see Figure 1). As such, the role of emotion regulation may help explain why—although political action is often viewed as desirable—people often do not engage in such action: The types of political situations that would benefit most from action may also be highly distressing, and this distress is likely to activate goals to regulate one's emotions, which in turn may effectively reduce the very emotions that would promote greater action.

### Current Studies

To test the proposed hypotheses, we examined reappraisal and political action in six samples of Clinton voters after the 2016 U.S. election, joining well-established paradigms from emotion regulation research and political psychology research. The 2016 election outcome provided a prime opportunity to test the link between emotion regulation and political action, given the strong emotional reactions the election garnered and the surge of action that followed.

Across all studies, we tested the link between reappraisal and either recent or intended political action. Studies 1a and 1b used a naturalistic design: In November 2016, participants reported their use of reappraisal to manage election-related emotions in the weeks immediately following the election. Study 1b also employed a longitudinal design wherein we followed-up with participants in January 2017. Studies 2a and 2b used a standardized mood-induction design: In March, 2017, we induced negative emotion by exposing Clinton voters to Trump-related news footage and then measured both the reappraisal they used while watching the footage as well as their subsequent emotional responses. Studies 3a and 3b used an experimental design: In June 2017, we assigned Clinton voters to either a reappraisal or a control condition while watching Trump-related footage and measured their subsequent emotional responses. Studies 2a and 2b allowed us to correlationally examine the proposed indirect effect wherein reappraisal predicts lower negative emotion, which in turn accounts for less

political action; Studies 3a and 3b provided experimental tests of this indirect effect.

To ensure that participants would experience negative emotions about the election outcome, we held political orientation constant in all studies by selecting participants who had voted for Clinton in the 2016 U.S. general election. In Studies 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b, we broadly assessed different negative emotions (e.g., *anger*, *worry*, *sadness*, *disgust*) and examined them as a composite because we expected Clinton voters to respond to the 2016 general election and its aftermath with a wide range of negative emotions. However, given a potentially specific role of anger in political action (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2004), we also examined anger, in particular.

To verify the robustness of the proposed links and to rule out possible demographic confounds (e.g., perhaps both reappraisal use and political action are more common in individuals of a particular age, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background), we controlled for age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in all studies.

### Plan of Analysis

First, we outline steps that were common to all studies regarding the determination of sample size, assessment of political action, and analytic approach. To ensure sufficient sample sizes, we conducted a power analysis to detect a small effect size ( $r = .20$ ) for the correlation between reappraisal and political action: attaining power of .80 required 193 participants (Fraley & Marks, 2007). We met this goal for all studies except the student sample in Study 1a, which was constrained by the fact that the Fall semester ended just three weeks after the election (final  $N = 140$ ). Considering our planned analyses to estimate an indirect effect in Studies 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b, we conducted a power analysis to detect a small indirect effect (based on small effects,  $rs = .20$ , for the a, b, and c paths): attaining power of .80 required 250 participants (Kenny, 2017). We met this goal for Studies 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b.

We assessed political action using a two-step procedure to reduce participant burden: participants first indicated whether they had engaged, or intended to engage, in a variety of specific actions within a particular time frame using a dichotomous-choice response (*yes*, *no*). Then, after making all dichotomous choices, participants rated the *extent to which* they engaged or intended to engage in each endorsed action on a scale ranging from 1 (e.g., participated in one protest; donated \$1–\$20) to 10 (e.g., participated in 10 protests; donated \$181–\$200), with “11” provided as the top response category (e.g., participated in more than 10 protests; donated more than \$200). Thus, each action was scored on a scale of 0 to 11 (where “0” signified no action). Finally, a composite measure of overall political action was created by summing the continuous ratings across all actions (e.g., see Miller & Conover, 2015 for a similar approach).

To analyze these data, we conducted standard parametric analyses (i.e., linear regressions). Because the political action measures were often non-normally distributed (i.e., a large proportion of “0” responses), we also conducted nonparametric analyses (i.e., zero-inflated negative binomial as an alternative model that accommodates a large proportion of “0” responses and is optimized for skewed data). The parametric and nonparametric results largely paralleled one another; thus, we focus on the results of the more



familiar parametric tests and discuss the nonparametric results in the few cases where the results diverge. All nonparametric results are included within the supplemental online materials.

## Ethics Approvals

All Study 1a procedures were approved by the University of California, Berkeley, Institutional review board under the protocol “The Effects of Emotional Goal Pursuit” (#2012–08-4593). All Study 1b procedures were approved by the University of Toronto Institutional review board under the protocols “The antecedents, process, and consequences of moralization” (#31102) and “Attitudes and emotions study” (#33962). All Study 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b procedures were approved by the University of Toronto Institutional review board under the protocol “The antecedents, process, and consequences of moralization” (#31102).

## Study 1

Collected in the three weeks after the election on November 8, 2016 (and a longitudinal follow-up session in January 2017), Studies 1a and 1b assessed individuals’ use of reappraisal to manage their election-related emotions since learning about the election outcome. Because people can use reappraisal in a variety of contexts, we specifically framed these items to refer to the emotions evoked by the election given that the present hypotheses focus on reappraisal employed within political contexts. Study 1a tested whether reappraisal predicted the political action individuals engaged in since learning about the election outcome. Study 1b tested whether reappraisal predicted the political action individuals intended to engage in between ‘today’ and the day after Inauguration Day (January 21, 2017). We selected this future time point given the high volume of protests that were being planned for the weekend of the Inauguration. We then followed-up with these participants in late January to test whether reappraisal predicted the political action individuals actually engaged in.

## Study 1a Method

**Participants.** Participants were undergraduate students at University of California, Berkeley, who received course credit for participation (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Of the 358 participants who originally enrolled in the study, the participants eligible for the present investigation were those who indicated they voted for Clinton in the 2016 general election ( $N = 187$ ). Prior to data analysis, participants were excluded if they did not complete the relevant portions of the study (6%) or if they failed the attention checks in the questionnaire (19%), resulting in a final sample of 140.

**Procedure.** Participants first reported their demographic characteristics. As this election study was added to ongoing data collection not related to the election, participants then responded to several general (i.e., not election-related) questionnaires about personality, self-regulation, and well-being. Participants next began the election-specific portion of the study. Participants reported their voting behavior, and experiences learning about the election outcome. Participants then reported the extent to which they had been using election-focused reappraisal since the election. Filler items asked participants about their attitudes, goals, and social interactions before participants completed the measure of political action. All data were collected between November 12, 2016 and December 1, 2016.

**Election-focused reappraisal.** To assess individuals’ use of reappraisal since the election, we used the reappraisal items from the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003) to construct six election-specific items (e.g., “To manage my feelings about the election, I reinterpret the meaning of the situation in more neutral, less negative terms”). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and averaged together ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ); the total score had an alpha reliability of .90.

**Political action.** Participants were asked about three possible political actions, indicating whether and to what extent they engaged in that action “since you found out about the election outcome.” The items were (a) “participated in any protest, movement, or rally,” (b) “donated money,” and (c) “volunteered time.”<sup>1</sup> This study diverged slightly from the process described in the “Plan of Analysis” section: here, because the donation and volunteering items were originally rated on a wider scale of 1 (“\$1”) to 201 (“greater than \$200”), we rescored them to match the scales used in the later studies (i.e., where 1 = “\$1–\$20” and 11 = “greater than \$200”) and then summed the items to create a composite index ( $M = 1.15$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ ). This composite had low reliability ( $\alpha = .26$ ), which may be attributable to the relatively low frequency of political action within the narrowly specified timeframe between the election (November 8) and “today” (which ranged between November 12 and December 1) and because these three actions may be distinctive or even alternative (rather than highly correlated) ways to express one’s political views. Based on these considerations, we retained this sum as an index of *overall* political action, and then improved the measurement of action in our subsequent studies by assessing action across a wider timeframe, including more action items, and including a longitudinal retest design in Study 1b.<sup>2</sup>

## Study 1a Results

As summarized in Table 2, individuals who used reappraisal more (vs. less) to manage their emotional responses to the election outcome were *less* likely to have engaged in political action since hearing about the election outcome,  $\beta = -.27$ , 95% CI[-.43, -.11],  $p = .001$ . This link remained significant even

<sup>1</sup> These items are framed in terms of responding to the election but do not specifically refer to *political* protests, donations, or volunteering. In Study 1b, all actions are in reference to the election or politics. In Study 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b (which occurred months after the election), all actions refer to politics or political views.

<sup>2</sup> The assumptions of coefficient alpha reliability also do not fully apply when an index’s items may include distinctive or alternative actions (Bollen & Lennox, 1991), as when a scale is considered a formative scale (wherein its items form the underlying construct of interest and need not be correlated) compared with a reflective scale (wherein its items reflect the underlying construct and should be correlated). Furthermore, when calculating the reliability of the three action items included within Study 1a using the longitudinal data from Study 1b (where participants first indicated the action they anticipated engaging over the next ~2 months and then indicated how much action they engaged in ~2 months later), the three items demonstrate higher internal consistency (Time 1  $\alpha = .58$ , Time 2  $\alpha = .40$ ), likely reflecting the fact that Study 1b captured a greater amount of political action across a wider timeframe. Additionally, these three items demonstrated strong correspondence from Time 1 to Time 2 in Study 1b,  $r = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Methodological Details for Each Study*

Variable	Study 1a (N = 140)		Study 1b		Study 2a (N = 285)		Study 2b (N = 305)		Study 3a (N = 305)		Study 3b (N = 295)	
	Time 1 (n = 222)	Time 2 <sup>a</sup> (n = 145)	Time 1 (n = 222)	Time 2 <sup>a</sup> (n = 145)	Reappraisal condition (n = 151)	Control condition (n = 154)	Reappraisal condition (n = 148)	Control condition (n = 147)	Reappraisal condition (n = 151)	Control condition (n = 154)	Reappraisal condition (n = 148)	Control condition (n = 147)
Ages, mean (SD)	21 (2.9)	36 (10.9)	36 (10.9)	37 (11.9)	35 (11.1)	38 (13.1)	34 (11.3)	32 (11.4)	34 (11.3)	32 (11.4)	34 (11.9)	34 (10.9)
Gender, % female	73%	61%	61%	60%	57%	56%	61%	55%	61%	55%	60%	63%
Ethnic background												
% White	42%	70%	70%	67%	65%	67%	64%	64%	64%	64%	72%	79%
% Asian/Asian Am.	38%	8%	8%	9%	10%	8%	10%	8%	10%	8%	9%	3%
% Hispanic/Latino	9%	5%	5%	6%	8%	9%	5%	12%	5%	12%	7%	6%
% Black/African Am.	3%	14%	14%	16%	16%	13%	19%	15%	19%	15%	11%	11%
% Other	8%	3%	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Socioeconomic status Ladder (1–10 scale)	6.8 (1.8)	4.8 (1.9)	4.8 (1.9)	4.9 (1.8)	4.3 (1.9)	4.4 (1.8)	4.3 (1.9)	4.1 (1.8)	4.3 (1.9)	4.1 (1.8)	4.3 (1.8)	4.4 (1.8)
Income (1–9 scale)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Methodological features												
Reappraisal measurement context	Use of reappraisal since the election	Use of reappraisal after the election	Use of reappraisal during the week	Action that occurred between Time 1 (Dec. 1, 2016) and “today”	Success using reappraisal in response to film	Success using reappraisal in response to film	Success using reappraisal in response to film	Success using reappraisal in response to film	Success using reappraisal in response to film	Success using reappraisal in response to film	Reappraisal was manipulated; Effort and success using reappraisal in response to film are also included	Reappraisal was manipulated; Effort and success using reappraisal in response to film are also included
Political action measurement context	Action that occurred between election day (Nov. 8, 2016) and “today”	Action planned between “today” and the day after Inauguration Day (Jan. 21, 2017)	Action that occurred between Time 1 (Dec. 1, 2016) and “today”	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017	Action planned between “today” and the end of 2017
Dates of data collection	Nov. 12, 2016 to Dec. 1, 2016	Nov. 30, 2016 to Dec. 1, 2016	Jan. 23, 2017 to Jan. 30, 2017	Jan. 23, 2017 to Jan. 30, 2017	Mar. 1, 2017 to Mar. 2, 2017	Mar. 17, 2017 to Mar. 18, 2017	June 16, 2017 to June 17, 2017	June 16, 2017 to June 17, 2017	June 16, 2017 to June 17, 2017	June 16, 2017 to June 17, 2017	June 19, 2017 to June 20, 2017	June 19, 2017 to June 20, 2017

Note. A dash (—) indicates that the data were not available for this sample. Socioeconomic status was assessed in Study 1 by asking participants to indicate where they are located on a subjective status ladder compared with other individuals in the U.S. (scale of 1–10), and in Studies 2 and 3 by asking participants to indicate their annual household income on a scale of 1 (<\$15,000) to 9 (>\$200,000).

<sup>a</sup> All the Time 2 descriptive statistics represent values for variables assessed at Time 1 when considering only the subsample of individuals who completed the Time 2 follow-up.

Table 2

*Regression Analyses Testing the Association Between Individual Variation in Reappraisal and Political Action Across All Studies (and Also When Controlling for Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status)*

Measure	Study 1a	Study 1b		Study 2a	Study 2b	Study 3a	Study 3b
	( <i>N</i> = 140)	Time 1 ( <i>N</i> = 222)	Time 2 ( <i>N</i> = 145)	( <i>N</i> = 285)	( <i>N</i> = 305)	( <i>N</i> = 305)	( <i>N</i> = 295)
Reappraisal predicting political action	$\beta = -.27$ [ $-.43, -.11$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .001)	$\beta = -.15$ [ $-.28, -.02$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .027)	$\beta = -.09$ [ $-.26, .07$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .275)	$\beta = -.28$ [ $-.40, -.17$ ] ( <i>p</i> < .001)	$\beta = -.22$ [ $-.33, -.11$ ] ( <i>p</i> < .001)	$\beta = -.19$ [ $-.31, -.08$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .001)	$\beta = -.13$ [ $-.24, -.01$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .028)
Reappraisal predicting political action while controlling for demographics	$\beta = -.23$ [ $-.39, -.08$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .003)	$\beta = -.16$ [ $-.30, -.03$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .021)	$\beta = -.17$ [ $-.34, .00$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .052)	$\beta = -.25$ [ $-.36, -.14$ ] ( <i>p</i> < .001)	$\beta = -.20$ [ $-.31, -.09$ ] ( <i>p</i> < .001)	$\beta = -.15$ [ $-.25, -.04$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .009)	$\beta = -.12$ [ $-.24, .00$ ] ( <i>p</i> = .055)

Note. Standardized beta weights, 95% confidence intervals, and *p* values are displayed. Effects with *p* values < .10 are bolded.

when simultaneously controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status,  $\beta = -.23$ , 95% CI[ $-.39, -.08$ ], *p* = .003<sup>3</sup>.

### Study 1b Method

**Participants.** Participants were Amazon's Mechanical Turk workers who received \$1.50 for participation. Of the 528 participants who originally enrolled in the study, the participants eligible for the present investigation were those who indicated they voted for Clinton in the 2016 general election (*N* = 247). Prior to analysis, participants were excluded if they did not complete the relevant portions of the study (3%) or if they failed all attention checks in the questionnaire (7%), resulting in a final Time 1 sample of 222. These participants were invited to complete the Time 2 follow-up survey, and 155 responded (70%, a substantial retention rate). Participants were excluded from Time 2 analyses if they did not complete the relevant portions of the study (3%) or if they failed all attention checks in the questionnaire (3%), resulting in a final Time 2 sample of 145. Attrition was not related to key variables: Those who completed both time points did not differ from those who completed only Time 1 on either Time 1 reappraisal use,  $t(220) = 1.06$ , *p* = .291, or Time 1 political action,  $t(220) < 1$ , *p* = .454.

**Procedure.** At Time 1, participants first reported demographic characteristics. Because this study was part of a larger data collection effort, participants responded to several general (i.e., not election-specific) questionnaires unrelated to the current hypotheses (i.e., assessing beliefs and well-being). Participants then began the election-specific portion of the study where they reported their voting behavior and experiences learning about the election outcome. Next, participants reported their use of election-focused reappraisal during the week after the election. Filler items asked participants about their attitudes, goals, and social interactions before they completed the Time 1 measure of political action. All Time 1 data were collected between November 30, 2016 and December 1, 2016. At Time 2, participants completed the Time 2 measure of political action, as well as additional questions not central to the present investigation, between January 23 and January 30, 2017.

**Election-focused reappraisal.** We assessed individuals' use of reappraisal in managing their feelings about the election outcome in the week after the election with six items based on the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003). In

our modifications, we reframed the instructions of the ERQ to refer to "how you controlled (that is, regulated and managed) your feelings about the election outcome" and we reframed the specific items to be in the past tense (e.g., *I controlled my emotions by changing the way I thought about the situation I was in*). Items were rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and averaged (*M* = 4.89, *SD* = 1.42,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Political action.** At Time 1, participants reported on six political action items, indicating whether and to what extent they would engage in certain actions between "today and Jan. 21, 2017 (the day after Inauguration Day)." At Time 2, participants indicated whether and to what extent they engaged in those actions "between the first phase of this study (December 1, 2016) and today." The six items were: "post on social media with content related to the election (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)," "have conversations about the election with like-minded people (in person, on the phone, via the internet)," "have conversations with NON-like-minded people . . .," "donate money to organizations that support your political views," "volunteer time to organizations or causes that support your political views," and "engage in protest activities related to the election (e.g., rallies, sit-ins, marches)." Items were summed to create a composite at Time 1 (*M* = 6.00, *SD* = 7.63,  $\alpha = .65$ ) and Time 2 (*M* = 7.48, *SD* = 7.80,  $\alpha = .67$ ; see "Plan of Analysis" section for more information). Validating the measure of intended action, the total action that participants *intended to engage in* (assessed at Time 1) was strongly related to the total action they *actually engaged in* (reported eight weeks later at Time 2),  $r = .64$ , *p* < .001.

Starting with Study 1b, in addition to assessing relatively traditional forms of collective action (e.g., engaging in protests), we took a broader approach to conceptualizing political action in the

<sup>3</sup> Given that all study samples included only Clinton voters, we did not expect individual differences in the degree to which people identified as liberal (vs. conservative) to play a strong role in the present results. In the present data, we ensured that the link between individual variation in reappraisal and political action was not dependent on individual differences in political identity—a well-known predictor of political action itself. When controlling for individual differences in political identity, the pattern of results across the six studies remains the same and the average effect size across the six studies for the link between individual variation in reappraisal and political action was reduced only slightly to  $\beta = -.16$  (from  $\beta = -.21$  when not controlling for political identity).

modern age using relatively nontraditional forms of action (e.g., posting on social media). As described in the supplemental online materials, the findings for Study 1b and all subsequent studies hold when separately examining the traditional or the relatively nontraditional forms of action.

### Study 1b Results

As summarized in the “Time 1” column of Study 1b in Table 2, Clinton voters who used reappraisal more (vs. less) to manage their emotional responses to the election outcome intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = -.15$ , 95% CI $[-.28, -.02]$ ,  $p = .027$ , even when controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status,  $\beta = -.16$ , 95% CI $[-.30, -.03]$ ,  $p = .021$ .

We then examined the follow-up data assessing the political action participants engaged in between Time 1 (post-Election Day) and Time 2 (post-Inauguration Day). Because these analyses diverged when considering the parametric versus nonparametric results, we discuss both types of analyses here. First, perhaps because the sample was somewhat underpowered at Time 2, when using the parametric tests, the link between reappraisal use during the week after the election and political action engaged in between Time 1 and 2 was nonsignificant,  $\beta = -.09$ , 95% CI $[-.26, .07]$ ,  $p = .275$ . This link was marginally significant, however, when simultaneously controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status,  $\beta = -.17$ , 95% CI $[-.34, .00]$ ,  $p = .052$ . When using the more sensitive nonparametric tests, individuals who used reappraisal more during the week after the election were significantly less likely to have engaged in political action between Time 1 and Time 2, even when controlling for demographics. For a full description of all nonparametric tests, see the online supplemental materials.

### Study 1 Discussion

Within the naturalistic context of Clinton voters’ lives after the election, reappraisal was used quite commonly. Across both Study 1a and 1b, people reported moderate to strong reappraisal use in response to the election outcome. These findings illustrate the motivation of many Clinton voters to repair their mood after the stress of losing the election. These findings also underscore the relatively common use of reappraisal in daily life, highlighting the utility—and the need—to examine and understand the outcomes of reappraisal.

Those who used reappraisal more when considering the election outcome were *less* likely to engage in political action, whether that action was assessed cross-sectionally or longitudinally (although the pattern was somewhat weaker in the smaller longitudinal follow-up sample). Importantly, the political action that individuals *intended* to engage in over the next two months was strongly related to the action they *actually* engaged in (which they reported upon two months later). This pattern indicates that people largely followed through on their intended action and provides evidence for the validity of the index of *intended* political action, which was the primary outcome within Studies 2 and 3.

Across Studies 1a and 1b, the link between reappraisal and less political action was consistent in two different samples: Study 1a consisted of students from the University of California, Berkeley (a unique cultural environment that is historically supportive of

liberal political action), and Study 1b extended these findings to a larger and more diverse sample, representing a wider geographic and age range of online workers. Importantly, the results held when controlling for various demographic features, indicating that the link between reappraisal and lower political action was not due to a confound with age, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Studies 1a and 1b did not assess Clinton voters’ negative emotions about the upcoming Trump presidency in the weeks following election night, but we expected that these individuals would encounter regular reminders of the forthcoming Trump presidency (e.g., in news coverage and social media). In turn, each of these moments would provide an opportunity for individuals to employ reappraisal to manage their negative emotional responses. It is likely that within these day-to-day experiences, individuals who successfully used reappraisal attained lower subsequent negative emotion, which may in turn account for less political action. Study 2 was designed to capture this process, emulating the day-to-day experience of Clinton voters encountering reminders of the Trump presidency in a controlled setting and testing whether reappraisal predicted lower negative emotion, and whether this negative emotion in turn accounted for lower intentions to engage in political action.

### Study 2

Collected in March, 2017, Study 2a and 2b were designed to replicate and extend Study 1 in five important ways. First, one of the strengths of the naturalistic design of Study 1 was that we could examine the effects of emotion regulation in the real world: namely, how Clinton voters responded to a recent, highly salient, and emotionally evocative political event (i.e., the 2016 election loss). However, reappraisal use may be confounded with the extent to which individuals were exposed to and reminded of this event during the weeks after the election. To address this potential confound, it was important to employ a standardized design that would expose all participants to the same emotionally evocative event (in other words, the same “dose” of Trump-related content). In Study 2, we used such a dosage-controlled design, where participants watched a pretested film clip depicting news footage of Trump. This context emulates the constant media exposure that many individuals experience on a regular basis.

Second, Study 1 assessed reappraisal using measures that did not specifically target the *successful* use of reappraisal (as distinct from efforts or attempts to use reappraisal; see Ford, Karnilowicz, & Mauss, 2017). Given that the links between reappraisal and both negative emotion and political action should specifically be driven by the *successful* use of reappraisal, we asked participants to report on their reappraisal success in Study 2. Third, to examine the proposed indirect effect, Study 2 tested whether individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film clip experiences lower negative emotion after the film clip, and whether this lower negative emotion in turn accounted for lower political action. Fourth, Study 2 extended the assessment of political action by using more items and a wider timeframe than Study 1. Finally, we conducted Study 2a in early March, 2017 and then conducted Study 2b in mid-March as a direct replication to verify the consistency of the effects.



## Study 2 Method

**Participants.** All participants were Amazon's Mechanical Turk workers who received \$1.00 for participation. A brief screener was used to recruit people who voted for Clinton during the 2016 general election. To keep the samples as consistent as possible across studies, we continued to collect data from Clinton voters (who were initially selected because we expected that they would be the most upset by the outcome and aftermath of the election, and who would thus have the most cause for engaging in emotion regulation *and* the most cause for engaging in political action). A total of 328 participants were enrolled in Study 2a and 323 were enrolled in Study 2b. Participants from Study 2a were not allowed to enroll in Study 2b (nor were any of these participants allowed to participate in Studies 3a or 3b—each of these studies represent unique samples of participants). Prior to analysis, participants were excluded if they did not complete the study (8% for Study 2a; 6% for Study 2b) or if they failed attention checks provided within the questionnaire (5% for Study 2a; an attention check was not included in Study 2b). The final sample size was 285 for Study 2a and 305 for Study 2b.

**Procedure.** After completing the voting screener, participants watched a 3-min video of recent Trump news footage. Afterward, to ensure that participants considered the content of the film clip, participants wrote about their initial reactions to the video for one minute. These free responses reflected participants' emotional engagement with the task and highlighted individual differences in the use of reappraisal, from relatively little use of reappraisal (one participant wrote that "This will go down in history as one of the most disgraceful presidencies in the history of the United States") to relatively strong use of reappraisal (another participant wrote that "My first reaction to watching this video is chaos and disorder. I don't believe [in] most of Trump's policies . . . but on the other hand, I don't believe or agree with the old way"). Participants then completed the measures of negative emotion, reappraisal success, and political action. The procedure was identical for Study 2a and 2b with one exception: Study 2a included other measures of individuals' prior use of emotion regulation and their recent well-being at the beginning of the study. Because these measures are not central to the present investigation, they were removed for the Study 2b replication. All data were collected between March 1 and 2, 2017 for Study 2a and between March 17 and 18, 2017 for Study 2b.

**Trump film clip.** A 3-min film clip compilation depicting Trump and his policies was developed by the authors, from original material available from CNN, *The Daily Conversation*, *Fox News*, and *ABS News-Good Morning America*. All footage was collected from common news channels and, although we made an effort to collect material from both conservative and liberal outlets, this clip overall represented a relatively unfavorable view of Trump. The film clip was pilot tested among a sample of Clinton voters ( $N = 60$ ) to verify that it increased negative emotion experience. As with the primary analyses, we examined the effect of the clip on a broad negative emotion composite (an average of *ashamed*, *disgusted*, *regret*, *sad*, *worried*), as well as on the specific negative emotion of *anger*, all rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). This clip induced strong negative emotion ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ), relative to prefilm clip negative emotion ( $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ),  $Cohen's d = 2.1$ ,  $t(59) = 12.85$ ,  $p < .001$ . This

clip also increased *anger* experience, in particular ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ), relative to prefilm clip anger ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ),  $Cohen's d = 2.2$ ,  $t(59) = 12.20$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Reappraisal success.** Participants reported their use of reappraisal in response to "the events portrayed in the video" using four items (e.g., "I thought about the situation in more neutral, less negative terms"), rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). For each item, participants rated what they deliberately "tried" to do (i.e., reappraisal effort) as well as their "success" in these attempts (i.e., reappraisal success). As explained in the Introduction to Study 2, we focus on the *success* ratings,<sup>4</sup> which were averaged together to create a composite ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ,  $\alpha = .88$  in Study 2a; and  $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ,  $\alpha = .89$  in Study 2b).

**Negative emotion.** After watching the clip, individuals rated their current experience of negative emotion using six items targeting common reactions to the election outcome among Clinton voters (*angry*, *ashamed*, *disgusted*, *regret*, *sad*, *worried*), which were rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Current negative emotion was assessed before reappraisal to ensure that reappraisal ratings (i.e., rating one's success at managing one's emotions) did not interfere with emotion ratings (i.e., how one is currently feeling). Five of the six negative emotion items (*ashamed*, *disgusted*, *regret*, *sad*, *worried*) were averaged together to create a global negative emotion composite ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ,  $\alpha = .88$  in Study 2a; and  $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ,  $\alpha = .88$  in Study 2b). The experience of *anger* was examined as a single item ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ , in Study 2a; and  $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ , Study 2b), allowing us to determine whether the pattern of associations would be unique to anger or if they would extend to a negative emotion composite (which did not include *anger*).

**Political action.** Three changes were made to the six-item political action measure developed in Study 1b: (a) the time-frame was considerably lengthened to "between today and the end of 2017"; (b) the items no longer referred to the 'election' and instead referred to politics and political views more broadly because these studies were conducted several months after the election; and (c) two actions were added: "Seek out additional information about politics (e.g., watch the news, read newspapers)" and "Contact your governmental representatives (e.g., via phone, e-mail, mail)." As described in the "Plan of Analysis" section, all eight items were summed to create a composite ( $M = 18.96$ ,  $SD = 17.48$ ,  $\alpha = .82$  in Study 2a; and  $M = 15.22$ ,  $SD = 15.69$ ,  $\alpha = .81$  in Study 2b).

<sup>4</sup> We focused on reappraisal success for theoretical reasons but we also empirically verified that reappraisal success was more relevant than reappraisal effort: In Study 2a, the negative emotion composite and anger were both more strongly predicted by reappraisal success ( $r = -.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively) than by effort ( $r = -.12$ ,  $p = .040$ ,  $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .012$ , respectively), and when success and effort were included together as predictors, only success remained a significant negative predictor. Political action was also more strongly predicted by reappraisal success ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than by effort ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p = .009$ ), and when both success and effort were included as predictors, only success remained a significant predictor. This exact pattern of results was also replicated in Study 2b.

## Study 2 Results

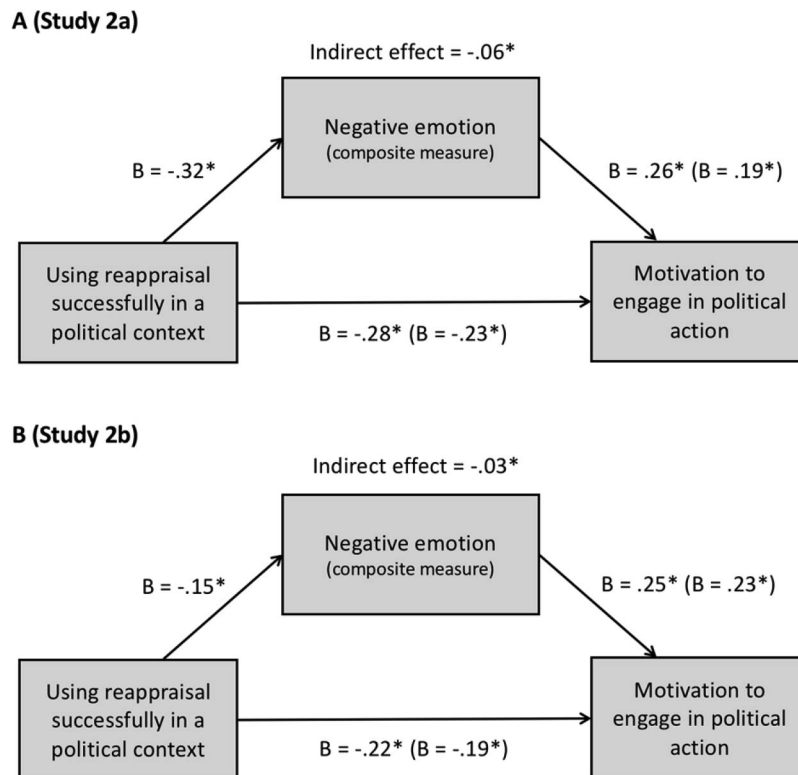
**Is greater reappraisal success linked with lower negative emotion?** For all analyses related to negative emotion, we first describe results for the negative emotion composite, and then describe results for the specific negative emotion of anger. In Study 2a, individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film experienced lower levels of negative emotion after the film,  $\beta = -.32$ , 95% CI $[-.43, -.21]$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 2), and the pattern was the same when controlling for demographic variables (age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status),  $\beta = -.31$ , 95% CI $[-.42, -.20]$ ,  $p < .001$ . Individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film also experienced lower levels of anger, in particular, after the film,  $\beta = -.28$ , 95% CI $[-.39, -.16]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.27$ , 95% CI $[-.38, -.15]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Study 2b replicated these results when considering both the negative emotion composite,  $\beta = -.15$ , 95% CI $[-.26, -.03]$ ,  $p = .011$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.11$ , 95% CI $[-.22, .01]$ ,  $p = .060$ ), and anger specifically,  $\beta = -.18$ , 95% CI $[-.29, -.06]$ ,  $p = .002$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.14$ , 95% CI $[-.25, -.03]$ ,  $p = .015$ ).

**Is lower negative emotion linked with lower political action?** In Study 2a, individuals with lower negative emotional responses

to the film intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = .26$ , 95% CI $[.15, .37]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .24$ , 95% CI $[.13, .35]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Individuals with lower anger responses to the film, in particular, also intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = .26$ , 95% CI $[.15, .38]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .25$ , 95% CI $[.14, .36]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Study 2b replicated these results when considering both the negative emotion composite,  $\beta = .25$ , 95% CI $[.14, .36]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .24$ , 95% CI $[.13, .35]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and anger specifically,  $\beta = .28$ , 95% CI $[.17, .38]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .27$ , 95% CI $[.16, .38]$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Is greater reappraisal success linked with less political action?** As summarized in Table 2, in Study 2a, individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = -.28$ , 95% CI $[-.40, -.17]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.25$ , 95% CI $[-.36, -.14]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Study 2b replicated this result,  $\beta = -.22$ , 95% CI $[-.33, -.11]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.20$ , 95% CI $[-.31, -.09]$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Mediation model.** The above pattern of results is consistent with a mediation model wherein reappraisal success predicts lower negative emotion, which in turn accounts for less political action



**Figure 2.** Analyses examining the indirect pathway wherein individuals who used reappraisal more successfully within political contexts experienced lower negative emotion, which in turn predicted lower intentions to engage in political action for Study 2a (Panel A) and Study 2b (Panel B). The negative emotion composite is depicted as a mediator here for simplicity, and the results are comparable when anger, specifically, is used as a mediator (as summarized in the text). Because all variables have been  $z$ -scored, all coefficients are standardized  $B$ s. Numbers in parentheses represent the pathways when both reappraisal and negative emotion are entered as simultaneous predictors in the model.  $^* p < .05$ .

(see Figure 2). To test this model, we used the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes, 2013) with 50,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the indirect effect (using z-scored standardized variables) and its 95% confidence interval. In Study 2a, the indirect effect was significant when considering the mediational role of negative emotion more broadly,  $B = -.06$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI $[-.11, -.02]$ , and when considering the mediational role of anger in particular,  $B = -.06$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI $[-.10, -.02]$ . This pattern was replicated in Study 2b when considering negative emotion more broadly,  $B = -.03$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI $[-.07, -.01]$ , and anger in particular,  $B = -.04$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI $[-.08, -.02]$ .

## Study 2 Discussion

Consistent with the emotion regulation literature, individuals who used reappraisal more successfully within an upsetting political context experienced lower levels of negative emotion (whether assessed using a broad composite or the specific experience of anger). Consistent with the political psychology literature, individuals with lower levels of negative emotion intended to engage in *less* political action. Consistent with the proposed indirect effect model (see Figure 1), individuals who used reappraisal more successfully intended to engage in less political action, in part because reappraisal contributed to lower negative emotional responses.

## Study 3

Conducted in June 2017, Studies 3a and 3b were designed to replicate and extend Studies 1 and 2. Studies 1 and 2 were critical in showing that Clinton voters used reappraisal to manage their politics-related emotions and that individual variation in reappraisal was associated with downstream negative emotion (Study 2) and political action (Studies 1 and 2). Together, these results provide support that the proposed model can be assessed in the real world (in the aftermath of the 2016 election; Study 1) as well as within a controlled context (as it unfolded ‘in vivo’ within a standardized study in response to a specific situation; Study 2). These correlations, however, do not provide causal evidence for the process specified within the proposed model (Figure 1). The longitudinal evidence provided in Study 1b begins to address the directionality of the proposed model, but to more thoroughly address the causal role of reappraisal, we designed two experimental studies.

In Studies 3a and 3b, we employed an updated pretested film clip that depicted more recent news coverage of Trump (i.e., summarizing his first 100 days in the presidency). Study 3a tested whether individuals assigned to use reappraisal (vs. a control condition) would experience lower negative emotion in response to the film clip, and whether this in turn would account for lower intentions to engage in political action. Study 3b was designed to test the same indirect effect using a more constrained set of reappraisal instructions to examine whether the pattern of findings was consistent across multiple types of reappraisal. We also assessed individuals’ effort and success at using reappraisal in Studies 3a and 3b, which served as manipulation checks. Assessing individual variation in reappraisal success also provided an opportunity to replicate the pattern of findings observed in Studies 2a and 2b by examining the correlations between individual variation in reappraisal success, negative emotion, and political action.

## Study 3 Method

**Participants.** All participants were Amazon’s Mechanical Turk workers who received \$1.00 for participation. A brief screener was used to recruit people who had voted for Clinton during the 2016 general election. A total of 325 participants were enrolled in Study 3a and 320 were enrolled in Study 3b. Prior to analysis, participants were excluded if they did not complete the study (4% for Study 3a; 6% for Study 3b) or if they did not pass the attention check (2% for Study 3a; 2% for Study 3b). The final sample size was 305 for Study 3a and 295 for Study 3b.

**Procedure.** After completing the voting screener, participants were randomly assigned to the reappraisal or the control condition. Participants in the reappraisal condition were instructed to use reappraisal when watching the film clip and those in the control condition were instructed to watch and respond to the clip naturally. To provide an opportunity to prepare using reappraisal or responding naturally to the clip, participants were shown two screenshots of the clip and were asked to write several sentences about the approach they planned to take during the upcoming clip. Participants watched the film clip, and then completed the measures of negative emotion, reappraisal effort and success, and the measure of political action. All data were collected between June 16 and 17, 2017 for Study 3a and between June 19 and 20 for Study 3b.

**Trump film clip.** The authors selected a 2-min compilation of news clips depicting Trump’s first 100 days in office. This clip was published by the *New York Times*, a widely read news source that is considered to be relatively critical of Trump. This clip was pilot tested among a sample of Clinton voters ( $N = 100$ ) to verify that it substantially increased average negative emotion (an average of *ashamed*, *disgusted*, *regret*, *sad*, *worried*), rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*), from baseline ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) to postfilm ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ), *Cohen’s d* = 1.44,  $t(99) = 13.26$ ,  $p < .001$ . This clip also increased *anger* from baseline ( $M = 1.71$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) to postfilm ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ), *Cohen’s d* = 1.57,  $t(99) = 12.54$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Reappraisal manipulation.** Studies 1a and 1b had revealed significant variability in individuals’ *tendency to use* reappraisal within the present political context, and Studies 2a and 2b showed significant variability in individuals’ *success at using* reappraisal in this context. Study 3 experimentally manipulated reappraisal, aiming to enhance individuals’ effort and success in using reappraisal. Because it can be challenging to reappraise recent and painful events, Study 3a’s reappraisal instructions were designed to first increase individuals’ compliance in following the reappraisal instructions and then increase the chance that individuals would employ useful reappraisal tactics:

We are going to ask you to watch a film clip that summarizes the first 100 days of the Trump Administration. Depending on your perspective, some might find the content of this clip upsetting. However, research shows that chronically experiencing emotional distress (e.g., anger, worry, sadness, hopelessness) can contribute to worse mental well-being, physical health, and social relationships. Because of this, it is important to manage these emotions. One way to manage emotions is to reconsider or reframe situations in a new way so that the situations are less upsetting and more hopeful. We know that it can be a challenge to change one’s perspective about a situation like this (e.g., how things might not turn out that badly in the long-run), but we



would like you to try. To help you reconsider the situation, here are a few approaches that other participants have considered useful: (a) “This experience is a wake-up call”; (b) “We will become a stronger nation from this experience.” (c) “We will learn from experience and will do things differently in the future.” (d) “When we look back on this in 20 years, it will be a blip.” (e) “It’s not all bad—he is trying to protect the country.”

In Study 3b, participants viewed similar reappraisal instructions that were revised to create a more focused set of instructions that provided just three tactics and did not include any reappraisal tactics that could be interpreted as implying the need for political action (e.g., “this experience is a wake-up call”):

One way to manage emotions is to reconsider or reframe situations in a new way so that the situations are less upsetting. We know that it can be a challenge to change one’s perspective about a situation like this (e.g., by considering how things might not turn out that badly in the long-run), but we would like you to try. To help you reconsider the situation, we would like you to try to take one of the three following perspectives: (a) “Our democracy is resilient and this will only last a short while.” (b) “When we look back on this in 20 years, it will be a blip.” (c) “It’s not all bad—he is trying to protect the country.”

Because Studies 2a and 2b revealed significant individual variability in reappraisal use when participants were given no specific instructions while watching a similar film clip, we wanted to constrain these naturally occurring individual differences in the control condition. In Study 3a, the control condition provided brief instructions aimed at emphasizing a natural (i.e., unregulated) response to the film clip: “We are going to ask you to watch a film clip that summarizes the first 100 days of the Trump Administration. Depending on your perspective, some might find the content of this clip upsetting. However, please allow yourself to embrace these feelings and be fully immersed in the experience of this film clip.”

In Study 3b, participants viewed similar control instructions that were slightly revised to remove the word “embrace” (thus encouraging an unregulated response to the clip, without mentioning the concept of emotional acceptance; e.g., Ford, Lam, John, & Mauss, in press): “please allow yourself to experience these feelings and be fully immersed in the experience of this film clip.”

**Reappraisal effort and success.** As a manipulation check, participants reported their use of reappraisal in response to “the events portrayed in the video” using four items (e.g., “I thought about the situation in more neutral, less negative terms”), rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). For each item, participants rated what they deliberately tried to do (i.e., reappraisal effort) as well as how successful they were in these attempts (i.e., reappraisal success). To ensure that participants in the reappraisal condition exerted more effort *and* were more successful in using reappraisal compared with the control condition, we examined a composite of their reappraisal effort ( $\alpha = .88$  in Study 3a and  $\alpha = .89$  in Study 3b) as well as their reappraisal success ( $\alpha = .87$  in Study 3a and  $\alpha = .88$  in Study 3b). See Table 3 for all means and *SDs*.

**Negative emotion.** After watching the clip, individuals rated their current emotional experiences using the same items as in Study 2a and 2b. The same as before, five of the six negative emotion items (*ashamed, disgusted, regret, sad, worried*) were averaged together to create a negative emotion composite (Study

3a  $\alpha = .88$ ; Study 3b  $\alpha = .87$ ), and the experience of *anger* was examined as a single item.

**Political action.** Individuals completed the same eight-item political action measure used in Study 2a and 2b (Study 3a  $\alpha = .75$ ; Study 3b  $\alpha = .76$ ). (See also “Plan of Analysis” section).

### Study 3 Results

**Individual variation in reappraisal success.** Before examining the effects of the experimental manipulation, we first aimed to replicate Study 2a and 2b by examining whether individual variation in reappraisal success predicted negative emotion and political action. These correlations were first conducted across the full sample and then moderations by condition were conducted to examine whether the correlations were consistent across both the reappraisal and control conditions.

**Is greater reappraisal success linked with lower negative emotion?** For all analyses related to negative emotion, we first describe results for the negative emotion composite, and then describe results for the specific negative emotion of anger. In Study 3a, individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film experienced lower levels of negative emotion after the film,  $\beta = -.37$ , 95% CI $[-.48, -.27]$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the pattern was the same when controlling for demographic variables (age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status),  $\beta = -.35$ , 95% CI $[-.46, -.25]$ ,  $p < .001$ . Individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film also experienced lower levels of *anger*, in particular, after the film,  $\beta = -.37$ , 95% CI $[-.48, -.27]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.37$ , 95% CI $[-.47, -.26]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Study 3b replicated these results when considering both the negative emotion composite,  $\beta = -.38$ , 95% CI $[-.49, -.27]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.38$ , 95% CI $[-.49, -.27]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and anger specifically,  $\beta = -.41$ , 95% CI $[-.52, -.31]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.40$ , 95% CI $[-.51, -.29]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). None of these effects were moderated by condition, indicating that the above pattern was consistent across conditions (interaction  $ps > .104$ ).

**Is lower negative emotion linked with lower political action?** In Study 3a, individuals with lower negative emotional responses to the film intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = .28$ , 95% CI $[.18, .39]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .25$ , 95% CI $[.15, .36]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Individuals with lower *anger* responses to the film, in particular, also intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = .29$ , 95% CI $[.18, .40]$ ,  $p < .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .26$ , 95% CI $[.16, .37]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Study 3b replicated these results when considering both the negative emotion composite,  $\beta = .18$ , 95% CI $[.07, .30]$ ,  $p = .002$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .17$ , 95% CI $[.06, .29]$ ,  $p = .004$ ), and anger specifically,  $\beta = .20$ , 95% CI $[.08, .31]$ ,  $p = .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = .19$ , 95% CI $[.07, .30]$ ,  $p = .001$ ). None of these effects were moderated by condition ( $ps > .293$ ).

**Is greater reappraisal success linked with less political action?** As summarized in Table 2, in Study 3a, individuals who used reappraisal more successfully during the film intended to engage in *less* political action,  $\beta = -.19$ , 95% CI $[-.31, -.08]$ ,  $p = .001$  (controlling for demographics:  $\beta = -.15$ , 95% CI $[-.25, -.04]$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Study 3b replicated this result,  $\beta = -.13$ , 95% CI $[-.24, -.01]$ ,  $p = .028$  (controlling for demographics:



Table 3  
*Effects of Reappraisal Instruction (vs. a Control Condition) on Reappraisal Effort, Reappraisal Success, Negative Emotion, and Political Action in Study 3a and 3b, and Statistics When Controlling for Demographics (Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status)*

Outcome	Study 3a	Study 3b
<b>Reappraisal effort</b>		
Reappraisal condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	4.77 (1.39)	4.62 (1.36)
Control condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	3.47 (1.82)	3.74 (1.72)
Cohen's <i>d</i>	.80	.56
<i>F</i> statistic	$F(1, 303) = 48.76, p < .001$	$F(1, 293) = 23.38, p < .001$
<i>F</i> statistic controlling for demographics	$F(1, 299) = 48.67, p < .001$	$F(1, 289) = 21.45, p < .001$
<b>Reappraisal success</b>		
Reappraisal condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	3.52 (1.51)	3.43 (1.46)
Control condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	2.50 (1.47)	2.52 (1.52)
Cohen's <i>d</i>	.69	.62
<i>F</i> statistic	$F(1, 303) = 36.32, p < .001$	$F(1, 293) = 28.17, p < .001$
<i>F</i> statistic controlling for demographics	$F(1, 299) = 42.21, p < .001$	$F(1, 289) = 25.98, p < .001$
<b>Negative emotion (composite)</b>		
Reappraisal condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	3.71 (1.66)	3.93 (1.59)
Control condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	4.22 (1.66)	4.43 (1.61)
Cohen's <i>d</i>	.30	.31
<i>F</i> statistic	$F(1, 303) = 6.95, p = .009$	$F(1, 293) = 6.99, p = .009$
<i>F</i> statistic controlling for demographics	$F(1, 299) = 9.13, p = .003$	$F(1, 289) = 6.44, p = .012$
<b>Anger (specific emotion)</b>		
Reappraisal condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	3.65 (2.05)	4.10 (1.95)
Control condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	4.33 (2.05)	4.52 (1.87)
Cohen's <i>d</i>	.33	.22
<i>F</i> statistic	$F(1, 303) = 8.45, p = .004$	$F(1, 293) = 3.48, p = .063$
<i>F</i> statistic controlling for demographics	$F(1, 299) = 9.99, p = .002$	$F(1, 289) = 2.90, p = .090$
<b>Political action</b>		
Reappraisal condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	16.54 (14.16)	16.93 (13.06)
Control condition, mean ( <i>SD</i> )	14.94 (12.94)	16.55 (14.24)
Cohen's <i>d</i>	.12	.03
<i>F</i> statistic	$F(1, 303) = 1.06, p = .303$	$F(1, 293) = .06, p = .811$
<i>F</i> statistic controlling for demographics	$F(1, 299) = .53, p = .465$	$F(1, 293) = .12, p = .730$

$\beta = -.12, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.24, .00], p = .055$ ). None of these effects were moderated by condition ( $ps > .437$ ).

**Mediation model.** Replicating Studies 2a and 2b, we used the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes, 2013) with 50,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the indirect effect (using z-scored standardized variables) wherein individual variation in reappraisal success predicted lower negative emotion, which in turn predicted lower political action. In Study 3a, the indirect effect was significant when considering the mediational role of negative emotion more broadly,  $B = -.09, SE = .03, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.15, -.05]$ , and when considering the mediational role of anger in particular,  $B = -.09, SE = .03, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.15, -.05]$ . This pattern was replicated in Study 3b when considering negative emotion more broadly,  $B = -.06, SE = .02, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.11, -.02]$ , and anger in particular,  $B = -.07, SE = .03, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.13, -.02]$ .

**Experimental manipulation of reappraisal.** After establishing that individual variation in reappraisal success predicted lower negative emotion which in turn predicted lower political action—and that these links were independent of experimental condition—we next turned to examining the experimental effects of reappraisal (vs. a control condition).

**Did the reappraisal manipulation lead to greater reappraisal effort and reappraisal success?** As detailed in Table 3, in Study 3a, individuals in the reappraisal condition exerted greater effort in using reappraisal than those in the control condition (Reappraisal  $M = 4.77$ ; Control  $M = 3.47$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.80$ ), and reported

using reappraisal significantly more successfully than those in the control condition (Reappraisal  $M = 3.52$ ; Control  $M = 2.50$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.69$ ). Study 3b replicated these results when considering both reappraisal effort (Reappraisal  $M = 4.62$ ; Control  $M = 3.74$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.56$ ) and reappraisal success (Reappraisal  $M = 3.43$ ; Control  $M = 2.52$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.62$ ).

**Did the reappraisal manipulation lead to reduced negative emotion?** In Study 3a, individuals in the reappraisal condition reported less negative emotion than those in the control condition (Reappraisal  $M = 3.71$ ; Control  $M = 4.22$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.30$ ), and reported less anger than those in the control condition (Reappraisal  $M = 3.65$ ; Control  $M = 4.33$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.33$ ). Study 3b replicated these results when considering negative emotion more broadly (Reappraisal  $M = 3.93$ ; Control  $M = 4.43$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.31$ ) and anger, in particular (Reappraisal  $M = 4.10$ ; Control  $M = 4.52$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.22$ ). These effect sizes were consistent across the two studies, indicating that the two reappraisal manipulations were comparably effective (see Table 3).

**Did the reappraisal manipulation lead to reduced political action?** As summarized in Table 3, in Study 3a, individuals in the reappraisal condition were not significantly less (or more) likely to engage in political action, compared with those in the control condition in either Study 3a or Study 3b. However, an *indirect effect* may still be present when a statistically significant direct effect is absent (Hayes, 2009; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Thus, we tested for the hypothesized indirect effect wherein the reap-

praisal (vs. control) condition predicted less negative emotion which in turn predicted less political action using the same analysis procedure as in Study 2 (see Figure 3). In Study 3a, the indirect effect was significant when considering the mediational role of negative emotion more broadly,  $B = -.09$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI $[-.17, -.03]$ , and when considering the mediational role of anger in particular,  $B = -.10$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI $[-.19, -.04]$ . This pattern was replicated in Study 3b when considering negative emotion more broadly,  $B = -.06$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI $[-.14, -.01]$ , and anger in particular,  $B = -.04$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI $[-.11, -.002]$ .

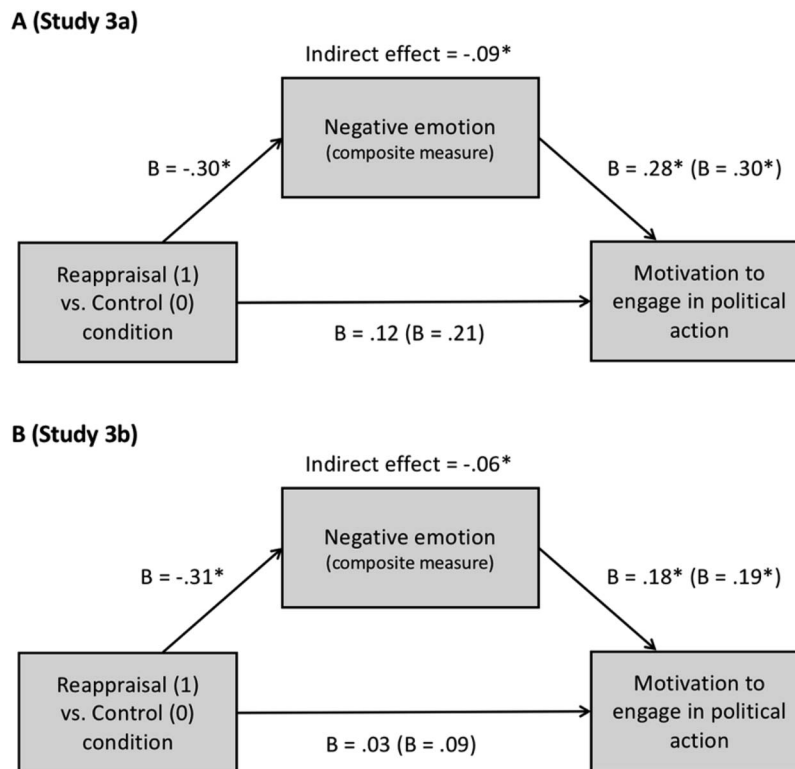
### Study 3 Discussion

In Studies 3a and 3b, we again replicated the finding that individuals who used reappraisal more successfully in politically upsetting contexts intended to engage in less political action. This association replicated in all six studies and across various methodological contexts, suggesting that it is quite robust. Additionally, within Studies 3a and 3b, the link between individual variation in reappraisal success and political action was not moderated by experimental condition (reappraisal vs. control), suggesting that how people naturally manage their emotions is linked with their

motivation to engage in political action, even within an experimental frame.

Importantly, Studies 3a and 3b provided experimental evidence that reappraising politically upsetting content reduces negative emotional responses to that content (whether assessing a broad negative emotion composite, or assessing anger in particular). Replicating the correlational findings from Studies 2a and 2b, the present two experiments also provided experimental evidence for the proposed indirect effect wherein individuals in the reappraisal (vs. control) condition experienced lower negative emotion, which in turn predicted lower intentions to engage in political action.

The present results raise the question of why we would observe a robust direct link between *individual variation* in reappraisal and lower political action (in Studies 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b) but consistently *not* find this direct link when reappraisal was *experimentally manipulated* (in Studies 3a and 3b). Multiple reasons are possible: First, it is possible that not all participants were compliant with the reappraisal instructions. This seems unlikely for several reasons, however. By persuading those in the reappraisal condition of the benefits of effective reappraisal, we directly aimed to increase compliance and evidence suggests we were successful in this aim: participants in the reappraisal condition reported



*Figure 3.* Analyses examining the indirect effect wherein individuals who were in the Reappraisal (vs. Control) condition experienced lower negative emotion in reaction to politically upsetting stimuli, which in turn predicted lower intentions to engage in political action for Study 3a (Panel A) and Study 3b (Panel B). The negative emotion composite is depicted as a mediator here for simplicity, and the results are comparable when anger, specifically, is used as a mediator (as summarized in the text). All variables have been z-scored except for experimental condition which was dummy coded (Reappraisal = 1, Control = 0). Numbers in parentheses represent the pathways when both reappraisal and negative emotion are entered as simultaneous predictors in the model. \*  $p < .05$ .

significantly greater reappraisal effort than those in the control condition (see Table 3). Indeed, most participants in the reappraisal condition (78% in Study 3a and 76% in Study 3b) reported at least a moderate degree of reappraisal effort (i.e., a “4” on a 1–7 scale). Individuals’ reappraisal effort also did not moderate the effect of condition (reappraisal vs. control) on political action in either Study 3a (*interaction*  $p = .183$ ) or Study 3b (*interaction*  $p = .908$ ), indicating that there is no association between experimental condition and political action even for individuals who exerted greater reappraisal effort. Overall, this evidence makes it unlikely that lack of compliance explains why the reappraisal manipulation did not directly result in lower political action.

Second, it is possible that not all participants who were instructed to use reappraisal were able to use reappraisal successfully. After all, reappraisal requires skill, and people may vary with regard to how much they can decrease their negative emotion using reappraisal. However, participants in the reappraisal condition reported significantly greater reappraisal success than those in the control condition. Perhaps even more importantly, participants in the reappraisal condition reported significantly lower negative emotion than those in the control condition, providing converging evidence that they were in fact using reappraisal successfully. Individuals’ reappraisal success also did not moderate the effect of condition (reappraisal vs. control) on political action (Study 3a *interaction*  $p = .788$ ; Study 3b *interaction*  $p = .437$ ), nor did individuals’ negative emotion moderate the effect of condition on political action (Study 3a *interaction*  $p = .659$ ; Study 3b *interaction*  $p = .503$ ). This pattern suggests that there is no association between experimental condition and political action even for individuals who achieved greater reappraisal success or lower levels of negative emotion. Overall, this evidence makes it unlikely that lack of reappraisal success explains why the reappraisal manipulation did not directly result in lower political action.

Third, and perhaps most plausibly, it is possible that experimentally manipulated reappraisal had a more heterogeneous effect on intentions to engage in political action compared with reappraisal that individuals employ habitually, of their own volition. In other words, we interpret this null main effect finding from the relatively common perspective that an unmeasured alternative mediator is exerting an influence, in addition to the measured mediator. The present results are consistent with a pattern wherein the reappraisal manipulation led participants to experience decreased negative emotion, which in turn decreased their motivation for political action (the proposed indirect effect), whereas the manipulation *also* led participants to experience something else which in turn *increased* their motivation for political action. Together, these two competing mediators suppress the main effect of the manipulation on political action due to their countervailing forces (see Hayes & Rockwood, 2017). For example, consistent with reactance theory (Wicklund, 1975), upon being asked to use reappraisal, some individuals may have been more motivated to reassert their autonomy and thus redoubled their commitment to choose political action. Or, consistent with identity theory (Swann, 1987), these individuals may have been motivated to reassert their identity as ‘good politically active citizens.’ In other words, reappraisal was effective (given that it helped individuals to feel less negative emotion), but it may also have challenged some individuals’ autonomy or identity, thereby enhancing their motivation to reassert their autonomy or identity through action. Future research that

empirically identifies these alternative mediators under contexts wherein reappraisal is experimentally induced will be a valuable addition to this literature.

These reactance-based or identity-based reactions are not likely to occur when capturing the extent to which individuals employ reappraisal of their own volition, as was the focus of Studies 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b. Overall, the present results underscore why it is crucially important to naturalistically capture the process and outcomes of emotion regulation. Experiments, although useful for creating standardized conditions, may not give an unadulterated view of how individuals behave when left to their own devices. When using research designs where regulatory preferences and behaviors could emerge naturally, rather than trying to experimentally change these preferences and behaviors, we observed a consistent association between reappraisal and lower political action that occurred via lower negative emotion.

Altogether, the present experimental findings suggest that reappraisal instructions heightened individuals’ reappraisal success, which in turn lowered negative emotion and reduced individuals’ intentions to become politically engaged. When considering the indirect pathway, it appears that reappraisal can provide an important benefit to one’s short-term emotional well-being that may come at an unintended cost to longer-term political action.

## General Discussion

Fostering a healthy democracy requires understanding what predicts and prevents individuals’ engagement in political action. Although negative emotion may be a predictor of *greater* political action, people are often motivated to reduce these unpleasant negative emotions. Thus, individuals who use an emotion regulation strategy that effectively decreases negative emotion, like reappraisal, may be *less* likely to engage in political action. The present investigation tested this hypothesis using a multimethod approach across six studies involving 1552 Clinton voters in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. election. This approach examined the link between reappraisal and political action within Clinton voters by combining naturalistic and experimental designs, cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, and reports of both political action intentions and reported behaviors. Across these studies, individual differences in the use of reappraisal predicted less political action, and both correlational and experimental studies provided evidence for an indirect pathway from reappraisal to lower political action via the reduced experience of negative emotion. These results held when considering traditionally assessed forms of action (e.g., protesting, donating, volunteering), as well as nontraditional forms of modern action (e.g., online posting), all of which can carry great weight in the present political climate. These findings also held when controlling for the potentially confounding nature of several core demographic features (age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status), underscoring the robustness of the findings.

The present research adds to the existing literature on the psychological processes underlying political action. However, unlike most research in this realm that targets variables that increase the likelihood one engages in political action, the present studies focus on a process that weakens the likelihood of such engagement. Examining variables that can weaken political action, such as reappraisal, we believe, highlights how dynamic and nuanced

the decision to engage in political action is. Even in highly upsetting political contexts, not everyone will take to the streets—other countervailing forces, including emotion regulation, may be at play.

### Theoretical Implications for Emotion Regulation Research

The present investigation informs our understanding of how emotion regulation shapes key outcomes in individuals' lives. Specifically, the present investigation suggests that Clinton voters who use reappraisal to manage their politics-related emotions are less likely to engage in democracy-shaping action. This finding is consistent with a theoretical approach wherein no emotion regulation strategy is necessarily 'adaptive' or 'maladaptive'; instead, the longer-term outcomes of any strategy—including reappraisal—should depend largely on the context in which that strategy is used (Aldao et al., 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Conceptually, when reappraisal is used in a context where it is possible to make longer-term changes to one's environment, using reappraisal to reduce negative emotions may also reduce one's motivation to exert longer-lasting environmental change. These findings are also consistent with recent models of group-based emotion regulation (Goldenberg et al., 2016), which describe the common conflict that can occur between an individual's hedonic motives (to feel better) and their group's instrumental motives (to take collective action). The present findings provide evidence for this trade-off, suggesting that within the present politically charged context, reappraisal can successfully reduce negative emotion on the one hand, but can also hinder political action on the other hand.

These findings are consistent with a trade-off between reappraisal and action that has been observed in several recent studies considering action across different domains. For example, in one study, people were asked to use reappraisal (or expressive suppression, a regulation strategy that does not reliably reduce negative emotion) during a resource distribution task in which they were recipients of ultimatums (i.e., 'take it or leave it' offers). The individuals who used reappraisal accepted a higher number of unfair offers (van't Wout, Chang, & Sanfey, 2010), presumably as they successfully reduced their moral outrage through reappraisal. In a related study, people were asked to use reappraisal (or respond naturally) during a similar task in which they were the one *giving* ultimatums. In this case, individuals who used reappraisal also *offered* a higher number of unfair offers because they successfully reduced their own guilt and remorse through reappraisal (Feinberg, Ford, & Flynn, 2018). The successful use of reappraisal has also been linked with worse psychological health when individuals are experiencing a higher (vs. lower) degree of controllable stress—a context in which it may be advantageous to take action to change the situation itself, rather than changing one's emotions (Troy, Shallcross, & Mauss, 2013). Taken together, these findings point toward important longer-term consequences of using reappraisal to successfully improve one's short-term emotions. The present investigation extends this research, establishing that reappraisal has consequences for engaging in political action.

In the present studies, we examined the role of negative emotion in the link between reappraisal and lower political action by considering both a broad experience of negative emotion (e.g., worry, sadness) as well as the specific experience of anger. Across all studies, we found highly comparable results whether considering negative emotion

more broadly or anger in particular. At first glance, it may seem odd that emotional experiences like worry and sadness would be linked with greater political action, but it is crucial to note that the outcome of any discrete negative emotion will depend on the *target* of that emotion. Although people feeling worried about the repercussions of their own political action may be less motivated to act, it is more likely in the present study that individuals were worried about the consequences of a Trump presidency, which contributed to greater motivation to act. Indeed, there is no single fixed action pattern associated with a given emotion—rather, emotions like worry (or sadness, or anger) can have a variety of behavioral outcomes that hinge upon the context in which the emotion is experienced (e.g., the emotion's target, situational affordances; Barrett, 2012). Parsing apart different contexts would allow for a more fine-grained analysis of how specific emotions may shape political action. In the context of the present research, we captured a broad negative emotional reaction to Trump and his policies, and found that reducing this negative reaction in turn reduced the intention to engage in political action within Clinton supporters.

### Practical Implications for Political Action

Being aware of the role that reappraisal plays in reducing politically relevant negative emotion and thus limiting motivation for political action could prove useful for activists aiming to mobilize political involvement. From their perspective, reappraisal could be problematic because it can impair efforts to rally supporters. To overcome these unintended effects of reappraisal, activists could strategically aim to influence the emotion regulation that others use. Evidence suggests that individuals can indeed shape others' use of emotion regulation (Dixon-Gordon, Bernecker, & Christensen, 2015; Zaki & Williams, 2013), even trying to heighten negative emotions in others when those emotions are potentially useful (López-Pérez, Howells, & Gummerum, 2017; Netzer, Van Kleef, & Tamir, 2015). Activists could, for example, capitalize on reappraisal's ability to *up-regulate* one's negative emotional experiences (Ochsner et al., 2004) by persuading individuals to reframe an upsetting political event in even stronger and more personally relevant ways, so as to heighten their willingness to feel negative emotion (Tamir & Ford, 2012; Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). Many of these exciting ideas are just now beginning to be empirically tested within the domain of collective action (see Goldenberg et al., 2016, for a recent review).

It is important to note that heightened negative emotion does not always generate *productive* action within political contexts. Negative emotion can also promote relatively unproductive or even violent action. As such, in contexts that are prone to unproductive or violent action, reappraisal can provide an important service. For instance, certain politically charged contexts often invoke strong moral emotions (e.g., disgust), which then trigger moral condemnation (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Reappraisal has been shown to reduce this condemnation (Feinberg, Antonenko, Willer, Horberg, & John, 2014; Feinberg, Willer, Antonenko, & John, 2012). For example, using reappraisal led American conservatives to have more progressive attitudes toward gay rights, including greater support for marriage equality (Feinberg et al., 2014). Similarly, although strong feelings of anger toward an outgroup breeds aggression toward that group (Horowitz, 1985; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003),



reappraisal can alleviate this aggression (Halperin, Pliskin, Saguy, Liberman, & Gross, 2014; Halperin, Porat, Tamir, & Gross, 2013). For example, using reappraisal led Israelis to have more conciliatory attitudes toward Palestinians, including greater support for peaceful policies (Halperin et al., 2013). Overall, these findings underscore the importance of bridging political psychology research with emotion regulation research to provide nuanced and useful tools to those interested in promoting healthy democracy.

### Limitations and Future Directions

The present research provides insights into reappraisal's role in our reactions to upsetting political situations, but it is important to note its limitations. First, although we measured political action by gauging self-reported intentions and recent behaviors, we did not observe political behavior directly. Although it is unlikely that the present results are skewed by reputational and impression management concerns given the anonymous nature of the studies, future research would benefit by incorporating observational methods that more directly track behavior, such as experience sampling methods or unobtrusive recordings of daily or in vivo experiences and behaviors (e.g., Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003).

Second, although we focused on reappraisal in the present investigation, any emotion regulation strategy that successfully reduces negative emotion should theoretically demonstrate the pattern observed here. Reappraisal is a commonly used and effective strategy that made strong conceptual sense to target for an initial investigation, but the present results may not be specific to reappraisal, per se. The possible specificity (or nonspecificity) of reappraisal in this context must be addressed in future research that assesses a wider range of emotion regulation strategies.

Third, the present investigation focused on the role of negative emotion in the link between reappraisal and political action because negative emotion is often examined in emotion regulation research and political action research, and because negative emotion was particularly salient in the aftermath of the 2016 election for Clinton voters. However, reappraisal can also be used to both increase and decrease *positive* emotional experiences (e.g., Kim & Hamann, 2007; McRae, Ciesielski, & Gross, 2012). In turn, positive emotions may have implications for political action. Hope, in particular, has been tied to collective action (cf. Cohen-Chen, Van-Zomeren, & Halperin, 2015). Future research will benefit from a thorough investigation of positive emotion in the context of political action, perhaps particularly when hope is most likely (e.g., before elections, etc.).

Fourth, it is important to better understand *why* individuals engage in political action. For example, some individuals may intentionally engage in political action because they believe that action will help them feel better. In this case, political action itself could represent emotion regulation as individuals attempt to change the situation itself as a way to change their emotions (e.g., situation modification; Gross, 1998). The present pattern of findings could also be understood from an emotion regulation dynamics perspective, wherein individuals may attempt multiple forms of emotion regulation within a given emotional episode (e.g., Kalokerinos, Résibois, Verduyn, & Kuppens, 2017). If individuals initially attempt reappraisal and are successful in this attempt, there is no need to engage in additional forms of regulation (such as political action, if individuals indeed consider action as a form of regulation). However, if individuals are unsuccessful with reappraisal, they may attempt additional forms of regulation in an

effort to attain regulatory success. Indeed, there are likely complex and multidirectional links between reappraisal, emotional responding, and political action. For example, even if individuals do not engage in political action as a form of emotion regulation, their action can still influence their emotions, which may in turn have consequences for emotion regulation. Future research will benefit from a comprehensive treatment of the connections between these constructs.

Lastly, the present research focused on political action within the context of the emotionally charged 2016 U.S. election and the current Trump presidency. This setting provided a compelling opportunity to conduct naturalistic studies of emotion, regulation, and political action. Although unlikely, the present findings could be specific to this particular political context and thus, future research should extend this work to other political contexts as well. On a related note, to study the political action implications of *negative* emotion, the present research focused on one particular group of voters who lost a recent election—namely, Clinton voters. It is also important to note that we targeted Clinton voters, not liberals per se, and indeed, many of our participants did not identify as strongly liberal. However, assessing this particular voting group could raise the question of whether the observed findings are specific to liberals. For example, past research has found that liberals and conservatives differ in their *mean levels* of emotional responding (e.g., Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014) and emotion regulation strategy use (Pliskin, Halperin, Bar-Tal, & Sheppes, 2018). However, these *mean-level* differences do not necessarily speak to whether the *association* between reappraisal and political action would be different for liberals and conservatives. From an emotion regulation perspective, the current studies are capturing basic processes that should unfold similarly in different groups of individuals experiencing intense negative emotions. That being said, future research will benefit from testing this perspective and examining the generalizability of the present results to political conservatives.

### Conclusion

Political action is fundamental to the democratic process. Although researchers have typically examined the forces that compel people to act, here we add to the burgeoning literature on what might hinder political action. Although negative emotions may be a strong predictor of various types of political action, the present findings suggest that Clinton voters' use of reappraisal—assessed via individual variation and experimental approaches—can alter these emotions and hinder such action. These findings suggest that although reappraisal serves as an effective strategy for individuals to manage their shorter-term unpleasant emotional responses to upsetting political events, this may come at the longer-term cost of instrumental democracy-shaping political action. In all, this research points to the importance of understanding the dynamic relationships between emotion regulation, emotion, and political action, and describes a more nuanced account that could provide utility to individuals trying to effectively rally others (or themselves) to take action and help shape society.

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