

**EMOTIONS IN PARTY RHETORIC:  
AN ANALYSIS OF BRITISH ELECTION MANIFESTOS**

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Paper prepared for presentation at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Conference of the  
*European Political Science Association*, 20-22 June 2013

## **Abstract**

Research in political psychology has highlighted the importance of emotions for persuasion yet we only have a limited understanding of the strategic use of emotions in party rhetoric. To rectify this, our paper introduces a measure of emotions in party communication that is based on psycholinguistics. We use the *Affective Norms of English Words* (ANEW) dictionary to generate affect scores from British election manifestos. This method allows us to construct a time series of UK party manifestos emotionality scores that span from 1900 until 2010. Furthermore, the paper seeks to explain when and why parties are more likely to employ affective rhetoric. We argue that emotionality is a tool used by political parties to differentiate themselves from other parties, especially when party policy positions are converging and elections are highly competitive. Our findings lend confidence in our measure of affect and corroborate our expectations of when parties make greater emotional appeals.

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This research is supported by a John Fell Research Grant, University of Oxford, entitled 'Exploring the Affective Norms of Political Party Manifestos'.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most casual observers of electoral campaigns are well aware that politicians rely on emotional appeals to get their message across. Candidates and parties often try to invoke positive feelings to woo voters, or seek to provoke anxiety and anger about their opponents to mobilize supporters. However, the vast majority of the empirical research on party competition has focused on policy shifts (Ezrow, 2007; Adams et al., 2004; 2006) and the notable exceptions that have examined nonpolicy competition have not looked specifically at the role of emotion in party strategy (e.g. Adams and Merrill III, 2009; Clark, 2009; 2013; Abney et al., 2013).

Political parties have incentives to engage in affective rhetoric<sup>1</sup> and research has shown that voters are influenced by emotional appeals both in terms of the way they engage in politics (increase in interest and attention) and in terms of how they approach the ballot choice (Marcus et al., 2000; Brader, 2006). Despite a growing scholarly interest in emotions and politics, we still have a very limited understanding of the implications of emotionality for party behaviour. Most studies on the role of emotions are based on survey and laboratory experiments that often place less emphasis on the role of political context and the dynamics of party competition (see e.g. Marcus et al. 2000; Brader 2006). As a result, it is still unclear how and when parties become more emotional in their party rhetoric.

The aim of this paper is thus two-fold. First, to introduce a new method to measure emotional affect in political texts, based on the widely used and validated *Affective Norms of English Words* (hereafter ANEW) psycholinguistic dictionary (Bradley and Lang, 1999). Applying this dictionary to party manifestos of the three main British parties (Conservative,

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms affective rhetoric, emotionality and positive affect interchangeably in this paper as they all describe the aggregate emotional content of manifestos that we are analyzing.

Labour and Liberal/Liberal Democrats) from 1900 to 2010 allows us to generate and analyse aggregate scores of the level of *affect* in each party programme. The second objective is to understand when and why parties make emotional appeals in their election manifestos. We develop and test two hypotheses with respect to emotional affect in party rhetoric. The first posits that party manifestos are more affective (more emotional) when parties' policy positions are less distinct, i.e. when there is low polarization. Building on spatial theories of party competition, we argue that when parties become less distinguishable in terms of their policy offerings, they use more emotional rhetoric in order to differentiate themselves from their opponents (see Stokes 1963; Adams and Merrill, 2009; Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005; Bruter, Erikson and Strauss, 2010). Our second proposition argues that when elections are highly competitive and there is greater uncertainty about the final outcome, parties become more emotional to increase their chances of winning.

This paper thus makes three distinct contributions to the literature. First, we introduce a new measure of emotional appeals in party rhetoric. This measure has the distinct advantages that it is replicable and it allows for time series analyses of party messages. Second, we extend the literature on spatial party competition to incorporate emotional appeals explicitly in the tools that parties can use to differentiate themselves on a non-policy dimension. Our findings, finally, shed light on the debate amongst spatial modellers on whether more polarization and policy divergence increase party emphasis on nonpolicy attributes (see Groschke, 2001; Serra, 2010; Adams and Merrill, 2009; Clarke, 2013; Stone and Simas, 2010).

The paper proceeds in the following way. We first motivate the importance of emotion in the study of party competition and present our method to measure affective rhetoric. We then present the time series for the UK party system. Thereafter, we present the

empirical tests of our propositions that are accompanied with a series of robustness checks to increase the confidence in our results. The last section discusses the implications of our findings.

## 2. BACKGROUND & HYPOTHESES

Party behaviour has been traditionally analyzed using the Downsian model of party competition (Downs, 1957; Black, 1958). According to Downs (1957), parties are office-seeking and they occupy policy positions close to the median voter to win elections. In his critique of the exclusive reliance on positional issues, Stokes (1963) proposed a model on which voters have preferences over nonpolicy characteristics that are nonnegative and orthogonal to the policy dimension. Specifically, he defined valence issues as “those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate” (Stokes, 1963: 373).

In existing literature, such non-policy valence issues have referred to characteristics such as candidate character traits (e.g. honesty and integrity) (Mondak, 1995; Stone and Simas, 2010, Abney et al., 2013; Clark, 2013), campaigning skill, competence (Clarke et al., 2004; 2009), and campaign contributions for name recognition (Adams et al., 2011). Whereas a substantive amount of formal work assumes that parties can only do little to alter voter perceptions about their nonpolicy attributes, a recent strand of this literature hypothesizes that political parties can manipulate and compete along the valence dimension to win elections (Serra, 2010; see also Asworth and De Mesquita, 2009; Meirowitz, 2009; Corrilla and Castanheira, 2002; Green and Hobolt 2008). We link that line of research with works on persuasion and argue that political parties engage in affective rhetoric to win elections. Their

aim is to convince the electorate that their policies are superior and they do so by appealing to voters' emotion.

There are various approaches to the systematic study of affect and emotions.<sup>2</sup> This literature has been focusing on how emotions alter the way citizens understand and evaluate politics. The theory of *Affective Intelligence*, for example, suggests that feelings like enthusiasm and fear stir public attention to politics and motivate involvement to political affairs and the election campaign (Marcus et al., 2000). This corresponds to a larger tradition in the study of emotion that identifies a strong relationship between emotion and cognition (e.g. Damasio, 1994), which encourages the understanding of emotion as an important tool for civic engagement (Marcus et al., 2000).

Potentially, the role of emotions in party politics has become ever more important due to the widely acknowledged change in electoral politics during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On this account, voter preferences have been moving towards the center, citizens have become more undecided and the number of partisans has declined (Dalton and Watterberg, 2000). To keep up with the changes in the distribution of preferences, political communications have also transformed from pre-modern campaigning that relied on partisan activism, leaflets and door-to door canvassing in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to sophisticated campaigns communicated through multiple media outlets (see Norris, 1997; 2000). The media environment, finally, has moved from traditional partisan press and public radio broadcasts to sophisticated TV ads and web campaigning (Norris et al., 1999). As a result, party strategies to win votes have become extremely complex and we argue that engaging in

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<sup>2</sup> We consider emotions as a set of physiological and psychological changes within the body and brain that come as a response to external, situational stimuli, occurring outside conscious awareness (Damasio, 1994; Lazarus, 1991; LeDoux, 1996; Marcus, 2002; Marcus, et al., 2000).

affective rhetoric reduces many of the problems associated with simultaneously targeting voters with different ideological characteristics.

Although the use of affective rhetoric is evident in campaigns, a great deal of work on affect and emotion neglects the importance of dynamics in party behaviour. As a result, while enlightening as to how citizens respond to emotional appeals, this literature is less helpful in terms of its predictions about party behaviour. It is still unclear, for instance, how and why a party would become less or more emotional in one election rather than the other. Riker (1986; 1990; 1996) has speculated that parties seek to win votes through rhetoric and their goal is to move public opinion to their respective ideological sides (see also, Jerit, Kuklinski and Quirk, 2009). In other words, policy positioning is one aspect of their strategy, but there is a strategic element in how, and most importantly, when they will invest in political rhetoric to convince the electorate that their proposed policies should be implemented in government.

Recent work has shown that even though candidates and parties always have the incentive to engage in persuasive rhetoric, there is substantial variation over time and across political actors (see Wood, 2007). We posit that the decision to become more affective is a strategic matter. If parties are certain about the distribution of preferences in the electorate, then they only need to convince the portion that would maximize their electoral performance. To win over those votes, they merely have to pledge for the voters' preferred policy. However, if many votes are concentrated around the political center and if more than one party competes for the same voters -independent of where these votes are located-, then parties will have also compete on the nonpolicy dimension that has the merit of enhancing

policy locations and making them more persuasive.<sup>3</sup> In such occasions, the volume of affective rhetoric at the party system level will inevitably increase.

We maintain that political, and specifically, affective rhetoric serves that purpose and the predictions about when parties will place more weight on affective rhetoric resembles to the workings of multidimensional party competition with parties relying more on nonpolicy aspects of their campaign when the policy offerings across parties are indistinguishable. We add to that discussion the prediction that uncertainty about the election outcome will also determine the degree of engagement in affective rhetoric. The latter corresponds to uncertainty about the election outcome and posits that when parties feel that the election is competitive and close will motivate the use of affective language in their rhetoric. The former suggests that in the absence of policy differentiation, voters will tend to rely upon nonpolicy-related attributes. As a result, vote-seeking parties that are indistinguishable in terms of policy will focus on improving their appeal to their electorate on nonpolicy grounds, and specifically on affective rhetoric.

Our argument concerning policy differentiation (or convergence) can be further motivated with a simple example from spatial modelling. Consider a race where two or more parties are located at the centre of the policy space. In such a situation, voters cannot meaningfully differentiate between the parties on policy grounds. Instead, they might give more weight to nonpolicy considerations, such as the positive emotional messages disseminated by parties, and this in turn means that parties will invest more in emphasising nonpolicy characteristics to win the election (e.g. Adams, 1998; Adams, Merrill III and

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<sup>3</sup> Notice that we do not explore whether different types of policy (e.g. the economy vs. the Health System) are more affective. We do have some expectations, however, that we shall explore in our future work. We rather argue that Affective Rhetoric has a direct and an indirect –through policy position- impact on vote shares.



Grofman, 2005; Green and Hobolt, 2008; Bruter, Erikson and Strauss, 2010). Many of those nonpolicy factors have been considered exogenous to party behaviour suggesting that parties are endowed nonpolicy characteristics and cannot manipulate voters' perceptions. In a model with endogenous nonpolicy attributes, Asworth and De Mesquita (2009) demonstrated that when policy pledges are converged then parties would tend to invest on nonpolicy factors.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, empirical studies have revealed inconsistencies with regard to this relationship. Somer-Topcu (2009) and Clark (2013) have found that in multiparty European elections, polarization enhances their nonpolicy dimension. Stone and Simas (2010), on the other hand, show that incumbent candidates with a character valence advantage will not move to the extremes, but rather adopt moderate positions (see also Adams et al. 2011). This latter finding is in line with formal model predictions assuming office-seeking parties (e.g. Schofield, 2003) on which in the absence of policy differentiation, parties will rely on nonpolicy competition to win the election (see also Asworth and De Mesquita, 2009). Equally, Green and Hobolt (2008) have found that British voters rely more on evaluation of nonpolicy characteristics of parties, such as issue competence, when parties have converged ideologically.

Building on both the formal and empirical literature, we expect that an increase in party system *polarization* should bring about a decline in emotional appeals. Conversely, party efforts to increase their emotional affect in their manifestos will increase when the

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<sup>4</sup> In a model with policy-seeking parties and with endogenous valence being determined before choosing policy location, Serra (2010) shows that high valence comes with low polarization. In general the sequence of the game and the motivations of the party change the empirical predictions of the formal models. In addition to Serra (2010), Groschlose (2001) Zakharov (2009) also start with parties deciding on the valence manipulation and then choosing their policy platform. Corrilla and Caldheira (2002), Schofield (2003) and Asworth and De Mesquita's models begin with parties choosing their policies and then manipulating their valences.

policy positions of the competing parties are close to one another. This leads us to our first hypothesis.

**H1:** *When political parties offer less distinctive policy positions, they are more likely to invest in affective rhetoric in their manifestos.*

Our second hypothesis examines the role of uncertainty in influencing party strategies. Works on uncertainty have been central in the study of party competition and relate to voter uncertainty about issues (e.g. Alvarez, 1997), about party location in policy space and as well as party uncertainty about their popularity and the positions and loyalty of voters. Budge (1994) makes a strong case for the role of uncertainty in constraining parties to change policy positions and echoes research by Robertson (1976), Wittman (1977; 1983) and Calvert (1985) who incorporated variable information into the spatial framework (see also McKelvey and Ordeshook, 1985).

We primarily focus on Calvert's work that links party strategy with uncertainty about popularity, i.e. uncertainty about the electoral appeal of a given policy platform. Adams, Merrill III and Grofman (2005: Ch 11), have extended this model to incorporate the nonpolicy-valence dimension. We argue that for vote-seeking parties, uncertainty concerning the competitiveness of the election will increase the reliance on affective rhetoric. In other words, when there is still chance to win the election, parties will be more likely to invest in affective rhetoric:

**H2:** *When elections are more competitive, political parties are more likely to invest in affective rhetoric in their manifestos.*

This hypothesis can be further extended to incorporate voter uncertainty. If a significant proportion of voters are undecided about how they are going to vote, parties have a clear incentive to engage in affective rhetoric since their policy pledges alone were insufficient to sway those voters. Parties, in effect, will be motivated to increase their emotional appeals to enhance their chances of winning over these voters.

## MEASUREMENT

### *Dependent variable*

As we noted in the introductory section, we introduce a new measure of affect that capture the positive emotional appeals in party communications. Using *The Affective Norms of English Words* dictionary (Bradley and Lang, 1999), that it is currently being validated in other languages (e.g. Redondo et al., 2007; Soares et al., 2012), offers the unique opportunity to produce an exogenous measure of emotionality where measures are not contaminated by partisan attitudes and political predispositions. This measure is based on psycholinguistics and produces affect scores based on individual wordscores for 2500 thousand unique English words that have been identified as having meaningful emotional content (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Belleza et al, 1986; Bradley and Lang 1994).<sup>5</sup> Participants of the ANEW study graded their reactions on a 1-9 point scale along two semantic differentials that range from bad-good (Pleasure) and passive-active (Arousal) and were also given words as anchors to facilitate their scoring. For instance, the highest score of the Pleasure dimension denoted feelings such as happiness, pleasure, satisfaction, contention and hope

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<sup>5</sup> Note that when regular expressions are added to the psycholinguistic dictionary the word derivatives and past tenses add 500 words summing up to approximately 3000.

while at the other extreme words like unhappy, annoyed, unsatisfied, melancholic, despaired, or bored. The highest score for the Arousal scale was describing feelings of stimulations, excitement, frenzy, jittery wide-awake or aroused. The lowest extreme can be described with words like relaxed, calm, dull, sluggish, sleepy and unaroused.<sup>6</sup> The participants had to score their emotional state on a 1-9 point scale for different samples of words.

The ANEW dictionary has been widely used to study of emotion, as evidenced by the hundreds of citations of the original study.<sup>7</sup> Dodds and Danforth (2009) recently validated the relevance of the aggregate emotional scores by comparing different types of text including songs by genre and the presidential State of the Union speech. They conducted their analyses by using random subsamples of the ANEW dictionary and demonstrated the robustness of the method and the face validity of the scores. While prominent in the studies of affect, emotion and attention, the ANEW database has been rarely used in political science. Young and Soroka (2012), who recently produced a Sentiment aggregation routine, compared and contrasted a number of Affect dictionaries and showed the relevance to their measure. The ANEW dictionary only had a modest correlation with the Sentimeter, yet this is primarily because it focuses on different --binary-- emotional dimensions. Gonzalez-Bailon et al. (2012) scored blog discussions and saw its correlations with tracking polls. While we are interested in linking emotional scores with vote intentions and vote shares, we are not testing whether parties are actually successful in

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<sup>6</sup> The ANEW dictionary also measures affect in terms of Dominance. The words describing the high extreme are controlled, influenced, cared-for, awed, submissive or guided, whereas the low extreme corresponds to feelings of being in control, influential, important, dominant, controlling and autonomous. For this paper, however, we only use the Pleasure and Arousal dimensions.

<sup>7</sup> A Google Scholar search on the ANEW database returns more than 800 citations.

swaying voters through their emotional appeals, but simply when they are more likely to make such appeals.

The aggregate scores we use in this paper are based on an automated word-by-word content analysis that produces a unique score for each of the two emotional dimensions, i.e. Pleasure and Arousal. Pleasure, in the ANEW dictionary defines the direction of emotion (pleasant/unpleasant) and arousal describes the intensity (see Zazonc, 1998). An extension of this model suggests that the two-dimensional structure of emotion can be re-conceptualised to enthusiasm and fear if one evaluates the high arousal/high pleasure poles and the high arousal/low valence poles respectively. Since we aim to examine dynamic changes in emotion, the polarity of the score is less of a concern for this paper. Instead, we use both the Pleasure and Arousal dimensions to measure aggregate positive direction in emotionality and the corresponding intensity for each UK party manifesto.

Our final score is calculated as the aggregate emotional score divided by the number of words in the document. We do that to ensure that shorter are comparable to the longer recent ones. A Perl routine, which also gives the frequencies of any ANEW words in the document, automates the estimations and facilitates the derivation of the Manifesto's affects scores.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Election Manifestos as a Source of Affective Rhetoric*

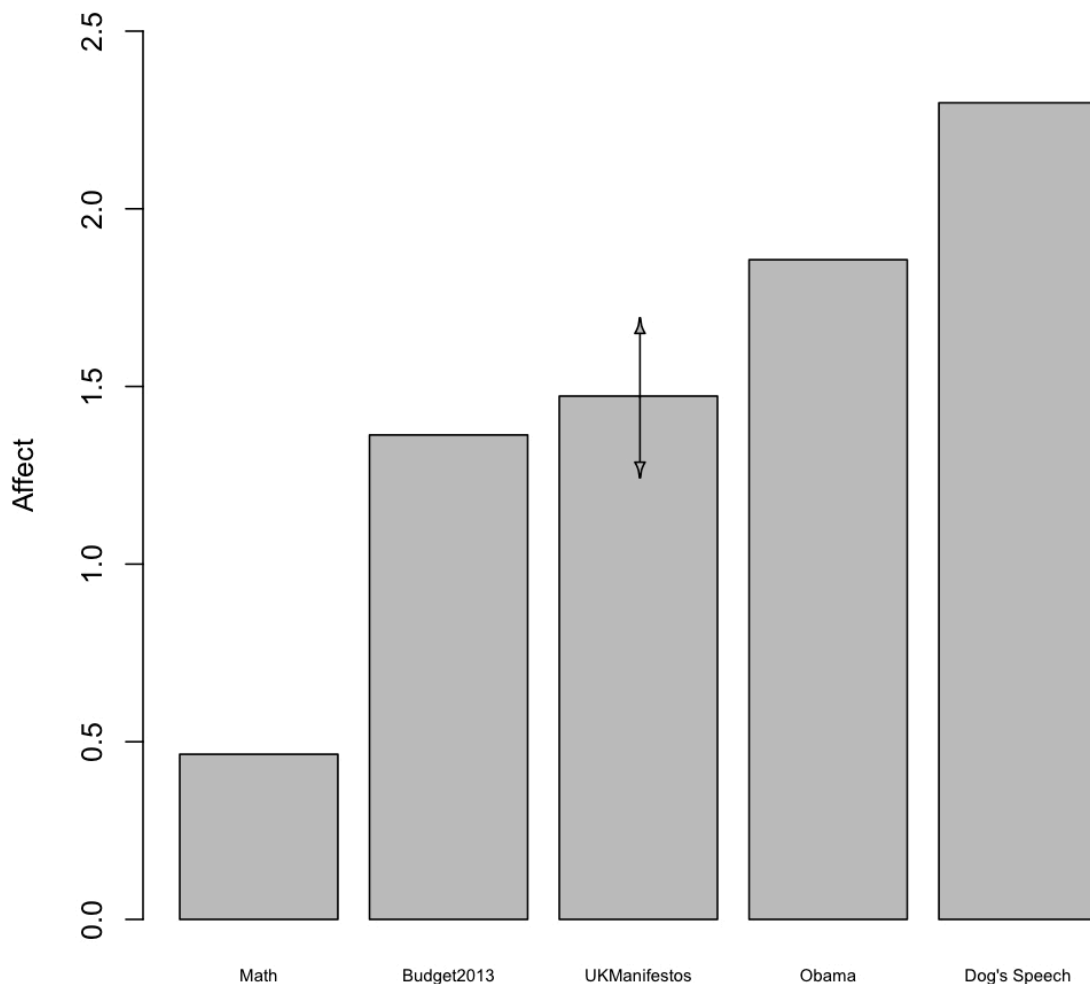
The analysis of affective rhetoric through policy platforms is a rather conservative way to assess how parties induce emotion during campaigns. Many would argue that candidate speeches could be better to make claims about emotionality in party rhetoric. Unfortunately, there are practical limitations to compiling such a long dataset of candidate speeches, which

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<sup>8</sup> The Perl routine will be available from the authors upon request.

would bring about problems of comparability and potentially raise concerns about the validity of our inferences. Party manifestos allow for the collection of comparable data across time and space. Moreover, manifestos are structured documents with specific goals that receive a lot of publicity (at least in the UK) and eventually to set the tone of the election campaign (see, Budge and Bara, 2001).

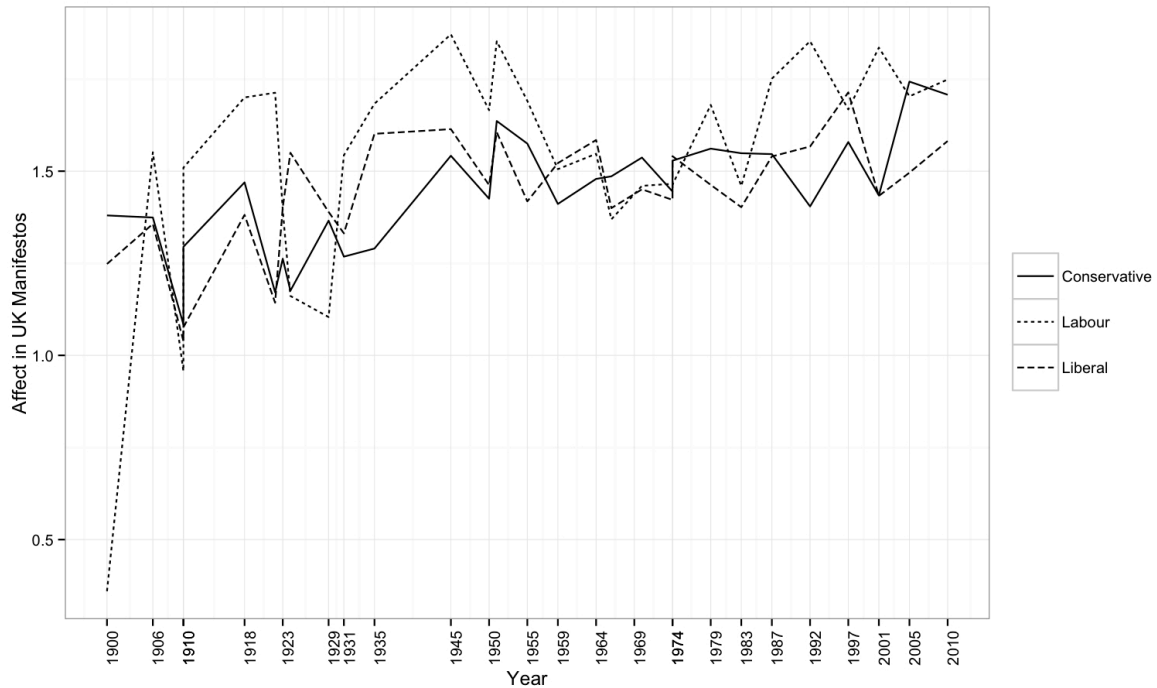
**Figure 1:** Affective Language Score Comparison across Different Texts



Our theoretical argument is based on the premise that political parties use emotions in their rhetoric. Before exploring emotions in party rhetoric, it is important to explore the face validity of our measure by examining how similar or different these scores are when compared to political and non-political anchors. We do that by analysing additional documents that can demonstrate the plausibility of our measure. We have chosen two non-political texts as examples of low and high emotionality and two political texts where we expect high and low levels of emotionality. The results are shown in Figure 1.

The affect scores for these different documents, including the mean score of the UK Manifestos, are shown in Figure 1. From left to right we plot the scores of positive affect for 1) an academic article from the Journal of Applied Mathematics, 2) the 2013 UK budget speech, 3) the average scores of all UK manifestos ( $\pm 1$  Standard Deviation), 4) President Obama's re-election speech and 5) the famous George Graham Vest Speech "A tribute to Dogs". As expected, the applied mathematics text produces the lowest score of positive affect and the "Tribute to Dog" Speech the highest. From the speeches related to politics Obama's re-election speech in 2012 has the highest score, the UK budget speech the lowest and our manifestos are somewhere in the middle. Interestingly, our UK manifestos vary substantially as shown in Figure 2 where we plot our Affect Scores for each UK party manifesto for every election since 1900.

**FIGURE 2:** Time series of Positive Affect in Manifestos Over Time by Party



In Figure 2 the X-Axis represents the election years and the Y Axis the score of Affect.

Our measure varies both across time, parties and elections. The lowest emotional score is given to Labour's 1900<sup>9</sup> and the highest to Labour's 1945 manifesto. We can observe that the affect scores increase after the 1945 election for then to return to moderate levels in the 1960s and 1970s and go back to high levels in the 1990s. What is more interesting is that parties *do* change the emotionality of their platforms and next we examine to what extent this is due to the factors outlined in our hypotheses.

### *Independent variables*

Having explicated our dependent variable we now turn to the explanatory variables that will be used to analyse emotional affect in party rhetoric. We present two sets of models; one testing our main *Polarization* and *Competitiveness* hypotheses using all the available

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<sup>9</sup> The 1900 Labour manifesto was unusually short, presenting a set of policies as bullet points. It is therefore unsurprising that it receives such a low affect score.



manifestos and one that incorporates public opinion measures in the model specification (Due to lack of data availability these measures are constrained to elections after the 1960s). We begin by discussing the operationalization of our polarization variable.

To measure party policy positions, we opt for a fully automated computer assisted scaling model that was recently developed from Slapin and Proksch (2008). Wordfish is a scaling technique and has the advantage that it does not need any benchmarking documents to extract the policy positions. Instead it assumes that word frequencies follow a Poisson distribution and performs a statistical analysis of word counts. In effect, the Wordfish estimates relate to over time distinctiveness in terms of word usage across the party system. Most of the existing work on party competition is based on party positions estimated by the Comparative Manifesto Project (see Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006). However, the CMP started the Manifesto analyses for elections that took place after the Second World War. The distinct advance of the Wordfish approach is that it allows us to make use of a much longer time-series of manifestos. Relying on the CMP positional measure would mean that we would be unable to analyse more than 15 publicly available manifestos from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However we confirm our hypotheses even with this smaller sample size.

To capture polarization in the party system, we use a weighted measure of party system dispersion that is based on Ezrow's work on the topic (see Ezrow, 2007; Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011). The variable is computed in the following way:

$$\text{Weighted Party System Dispersion} = \sqrt{\sum_{j=1} SS_j (P_j - \bar{P})^2}$$

where,

$P_k$  = the *weighted* mean of all the parties' Left-Right ideological positions

$P_{jk}$  = the ideological position of party  $j$  in country  $k$ .

$SS_j$  = Seat share for party  $j$ .

This specification of the polarization variable eliminates the bias that might be caused by positions taken by smaller parties (e.g. Labour party in the early 1900s and the Liberal party after the Second World War).

With respect to H2 we use the between-election change in the difference between the first and the second party's vote shares. Our expectation is that higher values (i.e. an increase in certainty) would lead to a decrease in affective rhetoric. An ideal measure of competitiveness would rely on public opinion data at the time when parties decide on the content of their manifestos (i.e. before the election), however, such data are not available for the entire period under investigation. Hence, we rely on actual election outcome data instead as a proxy of competitiveness. In the following section, we also incorporate public opinion measures that represent the aggregate uncertainty of voters as to how they are going to vote for a sub-set of our analysis. More specifically, we have coded all available British Election Studies and have included the proportion reporting that they decided during the campaign (as opposed to *a long time ago* or, *before the campaign*)<sup>10</sup>. We use this measure to identify the portions of the electorate undecided when parties drafted their manifestos.

### 3. MODEL SPECIFICATION & EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

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<sup>10</sup> The actual BES question reads as follows: "When did you decide to vote the way you did?" Some BES studies have a slightly different coding scheme but they all share the "during the campaign" answer.

Since our data are grouped by political party we opt for a panel regression model. This family of models ensures that any unobserved differences between parties will not affect our inferences. We present six in this section as well as additional robustness checks in the following section. To recap our main propositions on party system polarization, we have argued that that increases in the distinctiveness of party policy positions from one election to the other, will bring about a decline in the nonpolicy emotional affect score, and vice versa. We also expect that the competitiveness of the election, as measured by the changes in the absolute difference between the election winner and the (new) opposition, will influence the use of emotion in party manifestos. More specifically, we anticipate a decline in affect when electoral closeness decreases.

To test our polarization hypothesis, we examine the party system dispersion at the time of the election. To test our competitiveness hypothesis, we use the change in the differences in vote share between elections to approximate how parties decide about their manifestos in response to electoral uncertainty. We also include a set of control variables. We control for the Party of the Prime minister to ensure that our results are not just a function of the governing party and the possibility of coalitions and electoral pacts (one variable) to control for election where two parties came to a pre-election pact or that an election took place with a coalition as the incumbent. Following Norris' campaign classification (2001) we include post war dummy variable taking the value 0 for elections before and 1 for elections after 1950 to control for the transition from the pre-modern nature of political communications to the modern one. We also add the changes in the GDP and the rate of unemployment to control for macroeconomic conditions. Finally, we include a

lagged dependent variable to ensure that our estimates will not be plagued with autocorrelation.<sup>11</sup>

**TABLE 1:** Panel Data Regression Models of Positive Emotion in UK Manifestos

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	RE	RE	FE
Emotion(t-1)	-	0.140***	0.072*
	-	(0.022)	(0.021)
Polarization	-0.830***	-0.425***	-0.468*
	(0.146)	(0.131)	(0.141)
$\Delta$ Competitiveness	-0.096***	-0.092***	-0.097***
	(0.023)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Unemployment	-	-0.008**	-0.010
	-	(0.004)	(0.005)
GDP	-	0.104***	0.105*
	-	(0.029)	(0.029)
Incumbency	-	-0.029	-0.041
	-	(0.047)	(0.044)
Post-1950	-	0.116***	0.129*
	-	(0.034)	(0.036)
Constant	1.588***	1.244***	1.346***
	(0.056)	(0.068)	(0.031)
N	84	84	84
R <sup>2</sup>	0.115	0.341	0.366

Note: Heteroscedasticity Robust Standard errors in parentheses,  
Significant at \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10

Table 1 reports regression coefficients for three models. The first two random effects models provide the tests for the main hypotheses of the paper. The first model only includes the measures of Polarization and Competitiveness without any controls and without the lagged dependent variable. Both predictors exert a significant negative effect that remains

<sup>11</sup> In our fixed effects model we hold some reservations for using the LDV as it borrows from the explanatory power of other covariates. However, the results for the explanatory variables in column 4 of Table 1 stay the same with or without the LDV. In the appendix we present an additional where we take extra care for that issue by estimating a static model with both time and group fixed effects.

significant --albeit smaller for Polarization-- when we include controls and the lagged endogenous variable. The second model, that provides a more conservative test of our hypotheses, shows a negative impact of *Polarization* on the levels of affective rhetoric ( $\beta_{\text{Polarization}} = -0.425$ ), significant at conventional levels. It also shows that the larger the change in the electoral differences between the parties the smaller the average affect in the manifesto ( $\beta_{\Delta\text{Competitiveness}} = -0.092$ ). Model 3 replicates the full model (including both measures, the controls and the lag simultaneously) and employ party-fixed effects estimator. The results further corroborate our theoretical expectations.

Our controls show that incumbency (as measured by the PM's party) does not influence affective rhetoric and it does not alter our results when we omit it from the model specification. The Post 1950 period dummy demonstrates that average affect increased after WWII. This result is unchanged when we recode the variable for the years before and after 1950 (i.e. 1945 or 1955). Table 1 also shows robust economic effects that suggest that in good economic times there is an increase in affect in party rhetoric.

The models presented in Table 1 are based on 84 manifestos and 28 elections in the UK since 1900. The results show that the variation in emotion on party manifestos can be at least partly explained by the predictors in our model. This, in turn, affirms the usefulness and the plausibility of our measure. Table 2 reports regression models that serve two additional purposes; one empirical and one theoretical. As we mentioned in a previous section we operationalize our measure using a Wordfish scaling technique. To increase our confidence in the tests of our *Polarization* hypothesis, we replace the Wordfish estimates with the equivalent estimate of dispersion from the content analyses conducted by the Comparative Manifesto Project. We make this change in our main independent variable to ensure that the results also hold when we utilize the more commonly used CMP dataset for

party positions (Ezrow 2007; Adams et al., 2006; 2009). Second, we seek to test one of the basic underpinnings of our theoretical argument, that is affective rhetoric has increased because parties are more uncertain about the distribution of voter preferences. We thus add public opinion measures relating to voter uncertainty for the elections after 1964 (when we have available election data through the British Election Study) and estimate models that include the percentage of voters being undecided (Model 1) and partisan (Model 2).<sup>12</sup>

**TABLE 2:** Panel Data Regression models of Positive Emotion (CMP+Public Opinion)

	(1)	(2)
	CMP+Undecided	CMP+Partisan
Emotion(t-1)	0.300 (0.224)	0.451* (0.247)
PolarizationCMP	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.003** (0.001)
$\Delta$ Competitiveness	-0.147 (0.548)	-0.171 (0.581)
%Undecided	0.007*** (0.002)	
%Partisan		0.001 (0.002)
Constant	0.975*** (0.348)	0.864** (0.378)

<sup>12</sup> The undecided measure corresponds to the percentage of reporting that they decided during the campaign of each election and the percentage partisans corresponds to the proportion of BES respondents identifying with each of the three main parties.

N	39	39
R <sup>2</sup>	0.374	0.246

*Note:* Heteroscedasticity Robust Standard errors in parentheses.  
Significant at \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10

Starting with the effects of public opinion we find a significant effect for the undecided measure, which suggests that affective rhetoric increases when more undecided voters exist in the electorate. This relationship is plausible given our argument about uncertainty. Parties that cannot convince voters on the basis of ideology and policy proposals will invest in their nonpolicy characteristics when the electorate has more persuadable voters. The partisan measure, on the other hand, does not exert a significant impact. The positive coefficient, however, is surprising, as we would expect a significant decrease in emotion when party identifiers increase. A possible interpretation of this finding could build on theories about emotion and politics where feelings like enthusiasm induce the reliance on habitual behaviour. In effect, when parties observe that more of their partisans are present in the electorate seek to maintain them by becoming more affective in their language. Finally, with respect to our main hypothesis we find that the

operationalization of Polarization with CMP data corroborates our findings. As in Table 1 we reaffirm that increases in polarization result in a decline in affective rhetoric even when we use the CMP version of the polarization variable.

#### 4. SENSITIVITY ANALYSES

The models presented in Table 1 corroborate our hypotheses, however, we conduct additional sensitivity analyses to increase our confidence in our measure. In deriving the affect scores, we chose to normalize our measure by weighting the aggregate emotional score by the number of words in each manifesto. Other users of the ANEW dictionary have normalized the score of interest by the number of ANEW words per text (Dodds and Danforth, 2009, Gonzalez-Bailon et al., 2012). At the same time, the logic of word choice in the ANEW dictionary can have implications for the measure and, in turn, our results. The ANEW team analysed the emotional weights of words that were commonly used in the English language. It is safe to hypothesise that language has changed since 1900 and, in effect, the changes we observe in our measure can be an artefact of the method. However, simple analyses (not reported here) of word frequencies show that the correlations across manifestos of different time periods are high enough to conclude that the words used in manifestos has not changed that dramatically.<sup>13</sup>

Although Figure 1 shows that the variation is not necessarily time dependent, we test for the robustness of our results 1) by adding a time trend, 2) by including further controls and, finally, 3) by replicating the main model using an operationalization of the dependent variable measured by the number of ANEW words (rather than Manifesto word counts).

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<sup>13</sup> The analyses use the length weighted word frequency matrix of the manifestos in 1910, 1950 and 2010 elections. The correlations are based on the full sample of words (around 10000) and on random selections from that sample. The correlations from the full sample are extremely high because of the commonly used words the, a, that etc. When we randomly exclude 1000 observations (four trials) the correlations across manifestos are still strong, positive and significant.



With respect to the latter, we include the number of ANEW Words per manifesto in our original measure.

**TABLE 3:** Regression Models Predicting Emotional Affect with two operationalizations of Emotion and Additional Robustness Checks

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	<b>Trend</b>	<b>ANEW Words</b>	<b>Trend+ANEW Words</b>	<b>Affect by ANEWCount</b>
Emotion(t-1)	0.114*** (0.024)	0.112*** (0.020)	0.108*** (0.015)	-
Emotion(t-1) (ANEW)	-	-	-	0.095** (0.037)
Polarization	-0.319*** (0.115)	-0.450*** (0.099)	-0.354*** (0.0959)	-0.344* (0.2069)
$\Delta$ Competitiveness	-0.111 (0.074)	-0.172** (0.074)	-0.168*** (0.062)	-0.063 (0.114)
Time Trend	0.007*** (0.002)	-	0.008** (0.004)	-
ANEW counter	-	0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.213*** (0.035)	1.270*** (0.063)	1.205*** (0.025)	9.801*** (0.397)
N	84	84	84	84
R <sup>2</sup>	0.369	0.361	0.372	0.172

*Note:* Heteroscedasticity Robust Standard errors in parentheses.  
Significant at \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10

The results from the random effects models show that in most cases our results are robust. Model 1 in Table 3 adds to the core model reported in Table 1 a trend variable to control for the impact of time.<sup>14</sup> Model 2 of Table 3 adds the number of ANEW words appearing in each manifesto as a separate covariate and Model 3 controls for both. In all three models, the results for the two main variables (*Polarization* and *Competitiveness*) remain the same even though the trend predictor exerts some influence in the levels of emotion. Model 4 uses an alternative operationalization of the dependent variable where the aggregate scores are weighted by the number of ANEW word occurrences. The *Polarization* predictor is still negative and significant, however, the impact of the *Competitiveness* measure is negative but insignificant. In summary, the results demonstrate that 1) our measure of affective rhetoric is plausible and 2) it follows intuitive patterns that are unchanged (with few exceptions) when we perform strict robustness checks.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. DISCUSSION

Research on emotion and politics has risen to prominence in recent years. To date, much of this work has examined how citizens reason about politics and, particularly, how different types of emotion motivate reliance on habit or deliberation. This paper extends the literature on emotion and politics and links it with party competition. In this paper we demonstrate when and how political parties use emotional appeals in their rhetoric. Our technique to measure emotion makes possible the analysis of all UK manifestos published by the three main parties, by using the psycholinguistic dictionary *Affective Norms of English Words*

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<sup>14</sup> The positive coefficient for the time trend also indicates that emotion in party manifestos has been increasing over time. We believe that the de-alignment of the British electorate, the abrupt change in the media environment and political communications play an important role in that increase.

*dictionary*. We show that our approach to measuring affect in party communication produces a valid measure of emotionality in manifestos.

In addition to introducing a new measure, this paper successfully links spatial theories of party competition with the study of emotion and thus furthers our understanding of party strategy during elections. More specifically, we draw upon recent works that examine the trade-offs between policy differentiation and endogenous nonpolicy manipulation (Serra, 2010; Meirowitz, 2008; Ashworth and De Mesquita, 2009) and the role of uncertainty in party decision-making (Budge, 2001, Calvert, 1985; Adams, Merrill III and Grofman, 2005). We arrive at two important conclusions. First, in the absence of distinct policy positions, parties will increase the emotional appeals in their election manifestos. Second, we find that parties' emotional appeals will also increase when the election outcome becomes more uncertain.

These findings thus have broader implications for the study of party competition, as they show that emotional appeals are one of the tools that parties use to win elections when they are uncertain about the loyalty of voters and when they have little to offer in terms of alternative policy solutions. Further research should explore the extent to which such positive emotional appeals are successful in swaying undecided voters. They findings also raise more general normative questions about the nature of democratic representation during times where parties do not differentiate themselves solely, or even primarily, on the basis of alternative policies, but rather on the basis of nonpolicy characteristics, such as emotional messages.

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