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van Zomeren, Martijn

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## Toward an Integrative Perspective on Distinct Positive Emotions for Political Action: Analyzing, Comparing, Evaluating, and Synthesizing Three Theoretical Perspectives

Martijn van Zomeren  
University of Groningen

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*Which emotions explain why people engage in political action (e.g., voting, protesting)? To answer this question, theory and research in psychology and political science predominantly focused on distinct negative emotions such as anger. The current article conceptually explores the motivational potential of distinct positive emotions by developing an integrative perspective that specifies which positive emotions can be differentiated (i.e., their form), which function these emotions have, and which implications these have for explaining political action. To this end, I analyze, compare, evaluate, and synthesize three approaches to positive emotions (affective intelligence theory, appraisal theories of emotion, and broaden-and-build theory). This perspective generates new hypotheses for the field to test, including the role played by distinct positive emotions such as joy, inspiration, interest, hope, and pride in motivating political action. I discuss how this perspective may help restore a balance in research on emotions and political action by focusing on the motivational potential of distinct positive emotions.*

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**KEY WORDS:** positive emotions, affective intelligence, cognitive appraisal, broaden-and-build, political action

Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.

—Nelson Mandela (Long walk to freedom, 1994, p. 356, Dutch translation)

Engagement in political action (e.g., voting, protesting, campaigning) can be both an intensely negative and intensely positive emotional experience. As is clear from the above quote, political action is often a response to dark moments, but also a positively empowering act, keeping one's head pointed toward the sun and one's feet moving forward. Nevertheless, psychological explanations of engagement in political action predominantly focus on the *negative emotions* involved, such as anger (e.g., Brader & Marcus, 2013; Van Zomeren, 2016a; Webster, 2020). This may not be so surprising, as a common assumption of such explanations is that negative emotions prepare the individual for acting towards changing an undesirable situation (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Indeed, over the last decades, scholarly work contributed to a better understanding of political action, suggesting, for example, that distinct negative emotions like anger are pivotal in understanding when and why people vote or engage in social protest (e.g., Van Zomeren, 2016a).

Relatively little is known, however, about the role of *positive emotions* in explaining political action. Although there may be understandable reasons for this imbalance (e.g., one rarely protests against things going well), recent research in fact offers pointers to suggest that positive emotions may be important to study in this field. Specifically, Sabucedo and Vilas (2014) found that the experience of positive emotions predicted students' protest participation; Páez et al. (2015) found that participating in collective gatherings (e.g., folkloric marches, social protests) tended to increase the experience of positive emotions; Tolbert et al. (2018) found that enthusiasm was important in predicting favorable evaluations of a 2016 U.S. presidential candidate (see also Phoenix, 2019); and Klar and Kasser (2009) found that activists tend to have stronger positive emotions and (social) well-being than nonactivists. This hints at a currently unrealized potential for positive emotions to increase our understanding of the psychology of political action.

However, these studies do not operate under a common theoretical umbrella, and hence it remains unclear how to interpret these findings in conjunction. Which *form* do positive emotions take, which *function* do they have, and do they hold a potential to *motivate* political action?<sup>1</sup> Should researchers specify distinct positive emotions (e.g., pride, hope) or lump them together as one construct ("positive emotions")? This is not just an empirical but also a conceptual issue, as we currently do not have an integrative framework from which to generate hypotheses on the form and function of positive emotions as explanations of political action.

The main aim of this article is to move closer to such a framework that specifies which (and how many) positive emotions can be differentiated (i.e., their *form*, such as enthusiasm or hope), and which *functions* they have in relation to political action. To this end, I analyze, compare, evaluate, and synthesize three theoretical perspectives on positive emotions (affective intelligence theory; appraisal theories of emotion; and broaden-and-build theory). The resulting framework generates new research questions and hypotheses about which distinct positive emotions should matter to political action and why, and it offers a conceptual basis for systematic empirical research on the potential of positive emotions for explaining political action.

### **Balancing Negative Emotions for Political Action with Positive Emotions**

Political action can be broadly defined as "any action undertaken by individuals or psychological group members to achieve personal or group goals in a political context" (Van Zomeren, 2016a, p. 19). This psychological definition includes, but is not restricted to, specific manifestations such as social protest and voting behavior to achieve individual or group goals (e.g., social change) and therefore is relevant to different literatures (e.g., collective action, social movements, voting behavior) and different disciplines (e.g., psychology, political science, sociology). Moreover, this definition also includes different concrete forms of action that individuals may undertake for the same reasons (e.g., signing a petition, campaigning, attending town hall meetings, donating money to political organizations, volunteering for community organizations, environmental activism). More broadly, political action reflects the *agency* that humans can display together to potentially change the social structure in which they are embedded, for example, through individuals voting in democratic elections or through mass protests pressuring the powers that be to change agendas, norms, or laws. Explaining when and why people engage in political action is therefore an important way to a better understanding of how individuals, as political agents, can contribute to the political process, and to social change.

The last two decades or so have brought a renewed focus on the importance of emotions for explaining behavior. In contrast to previous approaches that viewed emotions as irrelevant or

<sup>1</sup>For instance, the experience of positive emotions may help individuals to "undo" (Fredrickson, 2013) negative psychological effects of racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination, or it may motivate individuals to join town hall meetings, become a member of an activist network, engage in campaign or community volunteering, or participate in social protests.

dysfunctional side effects of individual instrumental decision-making, modern emotion theories offer a functionalist account by assuming that emotional experiences help individuals to inform and navigate their behavior in a social world (Van Zomeren et al., 2012). Such theories depart from the assumption that distinct emotions are associated with specific patterns of cognitive appraisal (i.e., self-relevant perceptions of a situation) and specific motivational and behavioral tendencies (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Scherer et al., 2001). Anger, for instance, has been found to be grounded in appraisals of unfairness and other-blame and associated with tendencies to approach and confront the other. This is in part why it is often considered the prototypical protest emotion. Indeed, anger has a much stronger functional potential to motivate political action than, for example, sadness (Smith et al., 2008).

Similar meta-conceptual developments have occurred in neighboring fields and disciplines: Political scientists, for example, also assume a functional potential of emotions for explaining political action, as, for instance, is visible in the theory of affective intelligence (Marcus, 2002) and subsequent research using this theory (e.g., Valentino et al., 2011). Emotions also feature prominently in the study of social movements (Jasper, 2011, 2017), of which Goodwin et al. observed some 20 years ago that: “Most of the work on emotions in social movements remains scattered and ad hoc, addressing one emotion in a single kind of setting. It has yet to be integrated into general frameworks for studying mobilization and movements” (2000, p. 77).

Indeed, we need such a general framework, and this framework should balance the predominant focus on establishing the motivational potential of distinct *negative* emotions (e.g., Leach et al., 2006) with a focus on the motivational potential of distinct *positive* emotions. This is because this predominant focus on negative experiences does not do justice to the positive experiences that also come with engagement in political action, and, as I will outline below, there are good reasons for its potential for explaining political action to be further explored and examined.

### *The Motivational Potential of Distinct Negative Emotions*

Although negative emotions reflect just one cluster of motivations for why people protest or vote (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), it is a powerful cluster.<sup>2</sup> This goes in particular for anger, of which Gamson noted that it “puts fire in the soul and iron in the belly” (1992, p. 32). Indeed, feeling anger because of group-based discrimination predicts participation in social protest (e.g., Smith et al., 2012), whereas the communication of anger in political campaigns help mobilize voters and thus increase turn out in national elections (e.g., Valentino et al., 2011). Similarly, the experience of contempt (rather than anger) seems to motivate people to engage in more radical, violent forms of action (Tausch et al., 2011), whereas its communication toward other groups seems to be a recipe for polarization and escalation of conflict (De Vos et al., 2013). Furthermore, the experience of anxiety or fear influences preferences for political candidates (e.g., Russo, 2016) and demotivates social protest efforts (Miller et al., 2009). Such findings point to the importance of distinct negative emotions for explaining political action.

How can we interpret such findings? One influential perspective emerged from conceptual developments in psychological versions of relative deprivation theory (e.g., Kawakami & Dion, 1995; for a meta-analysis, see Smith et al., 2012) that emphasized its affective component

<sup>2</sup>I differentiate emotions on the basis of their experiential *valence*. The underlying rationale is that negative emotions signal something unpleasant that we experience as negative, whereas positive emotions signal something pleasant that we experience as positive. Some have argued that one can also differentiate emotions on a different basis, such as by valence and arousal level (Russell et al., 1989), or as whether its experience instigates approach (enthusiasm, anger) or avoidance (anxiety). Anger is an interesting case, as it is experienced as negative, yet it is also an approach emotion (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), thus mixing up the typical negative/avoid and positive/approach combinations. Such discussions, however, are beyond the scope of this article.

(i.e., the experience of resentment or anger, based on the perception of relative deprivation; see Mummendey et al., 1999). Such insights have been integrated with stress-and-coping models (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), such as in the dual-pathway model of approach coping with collective disadvantage (Van Zomeren et al., 2012). In this model, the experience of anger about injustice, as grounded in a relevant group membership or group identity (e.g., Smith et al., 2007), predicts individuals' intentions to collectively do something about unfairness. The experience of distinct negative emotions like anger is thus interpreted as part of a way to reactively cope with an unfair, self-relevant, stressful situation. The external validity of this idea was confirmed by van Stekelenburg et al. (2009), who surveyed Dutch street protesters and found that their anger predicted the intensity of their motivation to act (see also Klandermans et al., 2008), and with Shi et al.'s (2015) findings that denying Chinese students' voice in an important decision increased their anger and willingness for collective action.

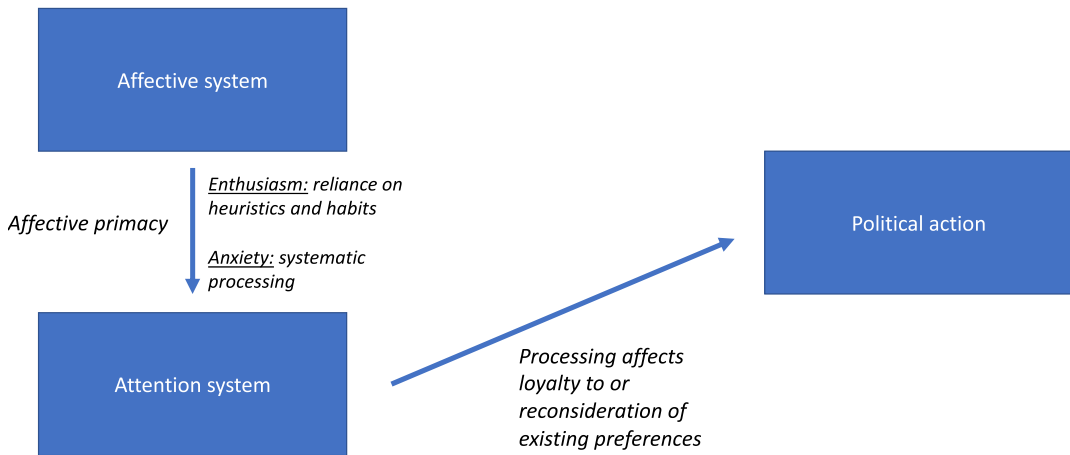
It is important to note that psychological studies often measure individuals' *willingness* to engage in political action, rather than actual behavior. Sometimes this tendency is criticized by suggesting that experiencing emotions may motivate individuals' willingness but not necessarily actual behavior. However, this seems too pessimistic an interpretation of these findings: In a recent meta-analysis of the collective action literature (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), across a large number of studies with different samples and contexts, results showed that effect sizes between emotional experiences of injustice and collective action were still positive and significant for behavioral measures (although smaller than for willingness measures). As such, any intention-behavior gap observed may not be so problematic when it concerns people's emotions relevant to political action: We can still use the same theories that we use to predict intentions to predict actual behavior.

Indeed, this conclusion is corroborated by primary research showing that the experience of anger increases the likelihood that individuals sign a petition (Miller et al., 2009), and that anger predicted individuals' collective action participation over time across a two-year time window (Leal et al., 2021). These findings also converge with political science research findings that anger motivates political actions such as campaign volunteering (Weber, 2013) and turnout (Groenendyk & Banks, 2014; Valentino et al., 2011), and that anxiety instigates vigilance and systematic processing (Brader, 2006). Together, these findings confirm the view that the experience of distinct negative emotions is not just an irrelevant or dysfunctional by-product of individual instrumental decision-making, but a functional motivational compass.

### *The Motivational Potential of Distinct Positive Emotions*

Does the same conclusion apply to distinct positive emotions? There are some pointers in the literature to suggest there is an unrealized potential for distinct positive emotions to have a similar functional, motivational value. However, such studies are scarce and use different theories, concepts, and measures, which obstructs a joint interpretation. Aside from studies showing the relevance of undifferentiated "positive emotions" in the context of political action (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Páez et al., 2015; Sabucedo & Vilas, 2014), other work has singled out distinct positive emotions such as *enthusiasm* and *hope* to help explain political action. *Enthusiasm*, for one, has been identified in political science research as a positive emotion involved in increasing heuristic processing and maintaining loyalty to political candidates (Brader, 2006). *Hope* has been the focus of recent psychological research finding positive correlations between hope and social protest (Cohen-Chen & Van Zomeren, 2018; Greenaway et al., 2016; Włodarczyk et al., 2017), although other studies are critical about whether such relationships are due to hope (Van Zomeren et al., 2019).<sup>3</sup> Thus, research from

<sup>3</sup>A few other studies have focused on *nostalgia* and its effects on social protest (e.g., Cheung et al., 2017; Urbanska et al., 2021).



**Figure 1.** Representation of affective intelligence theory. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

different theoretical traditions offers just a glimpse of the unrealized potential of distinct positive emotions to explain political action.

To realize this potential, we need a common theoretical framework from which to generate specific hypotheses to guide future research. As such, we first need to better understand how different theoretical approaches to positive emotions compare and can be integrated and applied to explaining political action. To achieve this, I use a four-step analytical method to evaluate the potential for theoretical synthesis (Van Zomeren, 2021). Specifically, I *analyze*, *compare*, and *evaluate* three influential approaches, after which I *synthesize* them into a broader model that generates new hypotheses about the functional, motivational role of distinct positive emotions for explaining political action.

### *Step 1: Analyzing Three Approaches to Positive Emotions*

The three influential theories of positive emotions I focus on<sup>4</sup> are the theory of affective intelligence (Marcus, 2002; Marcus et al., 2000), appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), and the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004, 2013). Each theory has potentially different assumptions about the *form* (i.e., which and how many positive emotions can be differentiated) and *functions* of positive emotions, and their *implications* for explaining political action. I analyze each in turn, compare them, and evaluate whether they can be synthesized.

#### *Affective Intelligence Theory*

According to this theory, individuals use their emotions to direct their attention to events, and this guides their cognitive processing of information. As visualized in Figure 1, people are assumed to have two distinct neural systems: one that governs their (dispositional) emotional experience and one that focuses their attention. Based on the principle of affective primacy (e.g., Damasio, 1994; Zajonc, 2001), the former influences the latter. *Enthusiasm* and *aversion* reflect two affective dimensions

<sup>4</sup>Recently, Keltner and Cowen (2021) offered a social-functional account of a taxonomy of positive emotions, which corresponded in important ways with those suggested by Weidman and Tracy (2020) and Fredrickson (2013). A discussion of these different accounts, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

that correspond to the goals of reward and punishment, respectively—with attention focus triggered by feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty because it signals something requiring further attention and thought. As such, anxiety is believed to influence individuals' choices by making people process information more systematically. By contrast, enthusiasm is believed to make people stick with their choices through a more heuristic way of processing information (Brader, 2006). As such, the theory makes assumptions about the relationship between emotion and cognition (i.e., the former directing the latter by drawing attention to rewards and risks; an example of *affective primacy*), and that such pivotal emotional experience is based on neural systems (i.e., in the brain) and thus may occur in or outside of consciousness.

Enthusiasm is thought to include positive emotional experiences with varying degrees of arousal<sup>5</sup> (including for instance happiness, hope, gratitude, and pride). The anxiety dimension is thought to include negative emotions with varying degrees of anxiety (such as sadness, fear, anger, and shame). Against this backdrop, Brader and Marcus (2013) suggested that anxiety, anger, and enthusiasm are key emotions in the context of U.S. politics (see also Valentino et al., 2011).<sup>6</sup> In terms of *form*, the theory of affective intelligence thus considers three distinct emotions, yet in terms of positive emotions therefore only effectively differentiates one (enthusiasm), cued by personal-goal alignment or achievement (i.e., risk or reward). In terms of *function*, enthusiasm is thought to influence cognitive processes that make one rely on heuristics, rather than systematic information processing. Enthusiasm should therefore motivate existing loyalties to the extent that it maintains already existing preferences and behaviors and as such can motivate political action (e.g., voting for a specific candidate or party).

### *Appraisal Theories of Emotion*

I refer to appraisal theories of emotion in the plural (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Roseman et al., 1990; Scherer, 2001, 2019; for an overview see Scherer et al., 2001) because it is common in this field to refer to a set of theories of emotion that all subscribe to an underlying process model of emotions. This model proposes that distinct cognitive appraisals (i.e., self-relevant perceptions of a situation) shape the experience of distinct emotions and distinct action tendencies (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman et al., 1990; Scherer, 2001). Based in the view that emotions are brief, multisystem responses to cognitively appraised changes in individuals' circumstances (i.e., the person-environment relationship, in Lazarus' [1991] terms), the core idea is that *cognitive appraisal* processes explain the experience of distinct emotions in the form of specific *appraisal patterns*. As such, appraisal theories do not subscribe to the affective primacy principle, as is assumed in the theory of affective intelligence, but instead assume a cognitive primacy principle (Lazarus, 1984; see also Cornelius, 1996). In this view, both the subjective nature of appraisals and their context sensitivity help to understand why different people may respond either with the same, different, or no emotions to the same event. Put differently, the core idea of appraisal theories is that when people make the same subjective appraisals of an event, they will experience the same emotions and action tendencies (Scherer et al., 2001), as can be expected from a functional, motivational account of emotions.

Some approaches offer an extensive list of different appraisal patterns that are believed to reflect the distinct cognitive “fingerprint” of distinct emotions (for a number of examples, see Roseman et al.,

<sup>5</sup>The theory revolves around valence and arousal as dimensions for core affect (Russell, 2009), which is different from the two other approaches analyzed here, which assume specific cognitive-appraisal patterns.

<sup>6</sup>One distinctive feature of this theory is that it assumes that multiple emotions can co-occur at the same time, but this is beyond the scope of this article.

1990).<sup>7</sup> Anger, for example, is based in the appraisal pattern of goal obstruction and other-accountability (or blame for malign intent); similarly, anxiety is based in an appraisal pattern of low urgency yet high uncertainty. Whereas some appraisal theories impose many differentiations on distinct emotion labels, others have argued for a more holistic approach. Lazarus (1991), for example, boiled down complex appraisal patterns to *core relational themes* for a number of distinct emotions. For anger, for example, this would be a “demeaning offence against me or mine,” whereas for anxiety this would be “facing an uncertain, existential threat.”

Note that appraisal theories specify such appraisal patterns for a variety of distinct negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, disgust, and guilt. For instance, sadness is based in an appraisal pattern in which one has no control over a self-relevant situation, with Lazarus’ core relational theme of “having experienced an irrevocable loss.” One reason for why appraisal theories specify such appraisal patterns is that the distinct emotion experienced is thought to prioritize (or prepare for) specific short-term *action tendencies* (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991)—to fight or flight, or to approach or avoid. Anger, for one, is associated with approach motivation (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), whereas fear is associated with fight or flight. The underlying assumption is that emotional experience helps individuals to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, for instance, by appraising situations in which urgent responses are needed for survival, and specific action tendencies receive “control precedence,” to use Frijda’s (1986) terminology. Such emotional experience is thought to function as a short-term motivational compass to navigate the world.

This is *not* the case, however, for positive emotions—in the theoretical universe of appraisal theories, positive emotions are generally unrelated to specific short-term action tendencies (Fredrickson, 2004). This is because a positive emotional experience often implies no specific priority (or preparation) for a specific course of action, as there is no urgent problem to solve. In most cases, the experience of positive emotions such as happiness is the end point of the process model, rather than being an urgent signal to motivate a specific short-term course of action (Fredrickson, 2004). Appraisal theories thus assume that negative emotions function to direct attention and action to manage threats to survival, whereas positive emotions signal no such threat or urgent need to respond, and hence have much lower motivational potential in the short run (see also Cohen-Chen et al., 2020). As such, appraisal theories offer useful ways to identify the cognitive fingerprint of distinct positive emotions (i.e., their *form*; see e.g., Smith et al., 2014), but they do not theorize much potential for short-term action (in terms of their *function*).<sup>8</sup>

### *Broaden-and-Build Theory*

Fredrickson’s (2004, 2013) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions suggests a greater variety of *forms and functions* of positive emotions. In line with a positive psychology approach to emotions that seeks to emphasize positive, flourishing, and upward-spiraling processes, the theory at first differentiated four distinct positive emotions (joy, interest, contentment, and love), a number later updated to 10 (now also including gratitude, inspiration, hope, pride, amusement, and awe; Fredrickson, 2013). Figure 2 lists these distinct positive emotions together with their theorized appraisal theme and thought-action tendencies, which tend to have longer-term focus.

<sup>7</sup>There is less consensus on how to conceptualize and measure this fingerprint—through fixed sets of appraisals that are all required for producing a distinct emotional experience, through core relational themes (that single out key appraisals) or through “fuzzy sets” of appraisals that have no necessary aspects (Kuppens et al., 2003).

<sup>8</sup>Hope has a cognitive-appraisal pattern including uncertainty and changeability (e.g., Lazarus, 1999). Different from negative emotions, however, there is no specific action tendency related to hope, which is why Lazarus (1999) called hope a “problematic” emotion.



**Table 1.1** Ten representative positive emotions

<b>Emotion label</b>	<b>Appraisal theme</b>	<b>Thought-action tendency</b>	<b>Resources accrued</b>	<b>Core trio in mDES item</b>
Joy	Safe, familiar unexpectedly good	Play, get involved	Skills gained via experiential learning	Joyful, glad, or happy
Gratitude	Receive a gift or benefit	Creative urge to be prosocial	Skills for showing care, loyalty, social bonds	Grateful, appreciative, or thankful
Serenity (a.k.a., contentment)	Safe, familiar, low effort	Savor and integrate	New priorities, new views of self	Serene, content, or peaceful
Interest	Safe, novel	Explore, learn	Knowledge	Interested, alert, or curious
Hope	Fearing the worst, yearning for better	Plan for a better future	Resilience, optimism	Hopeful, optimistic, or encouraged
Pride	Socially valued achievement	Dream big	Achievement motivation	Proud, confident, or self-assured
Amusement	Nonserious social incongruity	Share joviality, laugh	Social bonds	Amused, fun-loving, or silly
Inspiration	Witness human excellence	Strive toward own higher ground	Motivation for personal growth	Inspired, uplifted, or elevated
Awe	Encounter beauty or goodness on a grand scale	Absorb and accommodate	New worldviews	Awe, wonder, amazement
Love	Any/all of the above in an interpersonal connection	Any/all of the above, with mutual care	Any/all of the above, especially social bonds	Love, closeness, or trust

**Figure 2.** Positive emotions in the broaden-and-build theory (this figure was published in Fredrickson (2013). Copyright Elsevier Academic Press 2013). Republished with permission.

Indeed, broaden-and-build theory proposes distinct functions for these positive emotions, varying from *broadening* thought-action repertoires (rather than prioritizing a specific action tendency, such as approach or avoidance) toward *building* social, psychological, and physiological resources over time. Positive emotions are thus not viewed as short-term responses to an undesired state of affairs, but as proactive motivators of psychological (creative) and social (networking) processes over time. This uniquely implies that the experience of distinct positive emotions may have important psychological and relational implications over time and that the experience of such positive emotions serves an *optimizing* function (in addition to hedonistic or homeostatic functions). Put differently, these do not just signal optimal functioning, but they *produce* it over time (Fredrickson, 2004). When applied to political action, a host of concrete forms of action come to mind in which this social potential is clear (e.g., attending town hall meetings, campaigning, volunteering for community organizations, becoming a member of a social movement).

As for the *broadening* function, Fredrickson proposes that, for example, “joy sparks the urge to *play*, interest sparks the urge to *explore*, contentment sparks the urge to *savour and integrate*, and love sparks a recurring cycle of each of these urges within safe, close relationships” (2004, p. 1369). The assumption here is that these urges are functional and motivational in nature and that enacting these urges promotes engagement in new and creative actions, ideas, and relationships, which *builds* psychological and social resources (e.g., social capital). This can even function as a psychological buffer against negative (political) events and thus help to deal constructively with such stress (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018).

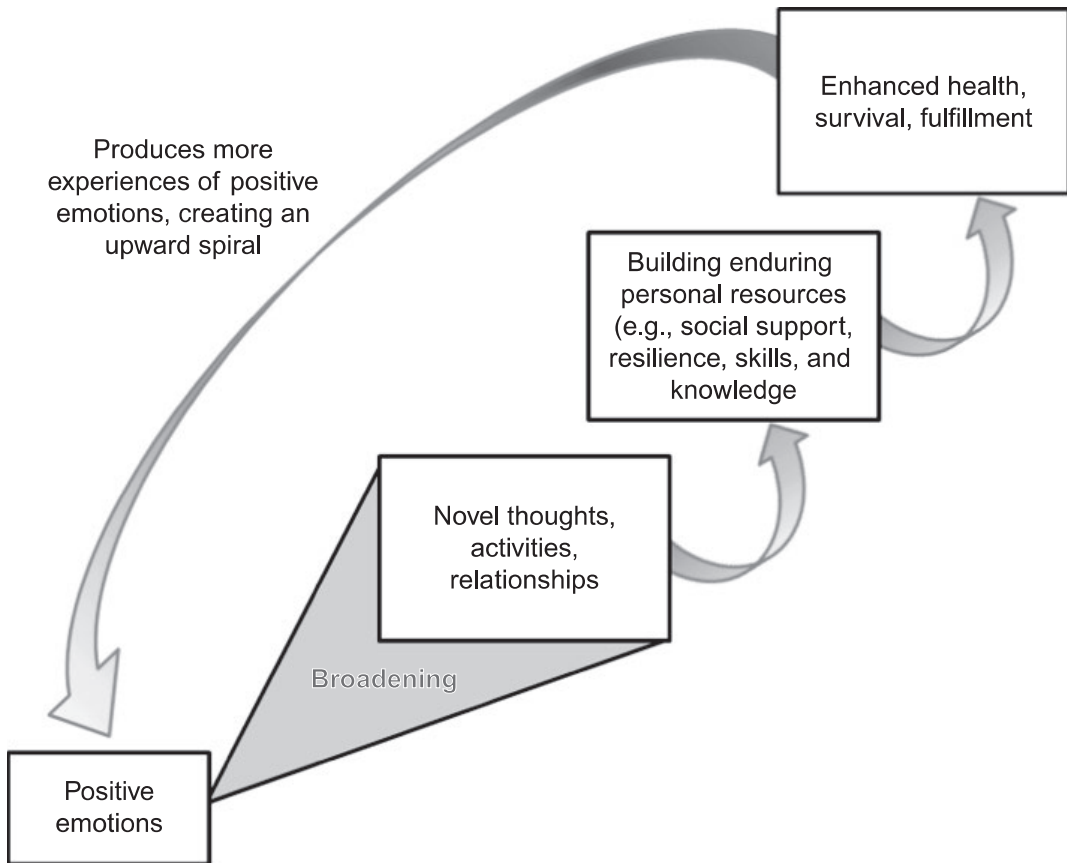
Importantly, these broaden-and-build functions of distinct positive emotions are assumed to optimize human functioning to the extent that they increase individual well-being and facilitate psychological growth over time.<sup>9</sup> As visualized in Figure 3, the broaden-and-build functions of positive emotions are assumed to be intricately related and suggest an upward-spiral model as a result. Therefore, the theory makes strong assumptions about the functions of experiencing distinct positive emotions that seem longer-term oriented than the short-term functions of experiencing distinct negative emotions. Specifically, negative emotions are assumed to have adaptive, short-term benefits to urgent situations that threaten survival. By contrast, positive emotions are assumed to have similarly adaptive yet longer-term benefits in terms of increasing the scope of thought and action and building resources to facilitate optimal functioning. Different from appraisal theories, then, broaden-and-build theory assumes that it is useful to differentiate positive emotions because their experience serves to broaden thought-action repertoires and build resources that increase individual resilience and well-being.

### *Step 2: Comparing Three Approaches to Positive Emotions*

I now compare the three perspectives on the basis of whether it makes sense to differentiate the *form* (which and how many) positive emotions can take (see Table 1, for an overview), what the *functions* of such distinct positive emotions are, and, key to this article, which *implications* these positive emotions have for explaining political action. Establishing comparability is important to understand whether different theoretical perspectives focus on the same phenomenon or on entirely different conceptual universes—if one wants to use different theories in conjunction to explain a phenomenon, they need to be to some extent comparable (Van Zomeren, 2021).

In terms of *form*, the theory of affective intelligence suggests to differentiate enthusiasm, anxiety, and anger. As such, this perspective implies that enthusiasm is the only positive emotion in town. By contrast, appraisal theories of emotion and the broaden-and-build theory differentiate a variety of

<sup>9</sup>The meta-theory assumed is also much more humanist (compared to cognitivist/functionalist for the other two; Slife & Williams, 1995).



**Figure 3.** Process model of broaden-and-build theory (this figure was published in Fredrickson (2013). Copyright Elsevier Academic Press 2013). Republished with permission.

positive emotions by virtue of their cognitive fingerprints and their different functions, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Thus, whereas the theory of affective intelligence assumes one positive emotional experience with one specific motivational outcome (increasing reliance on heuristics and loyalty to existing preferences), appraisal theories and broaden-and-build theories suggest that distinct positive emotional experiences are both possible and functional via distinct cognitive appraisal patterns and longer-term functions, respectively.

Indeed, in terms of *function(s)*, the theory of affective intelligence suggests that enthusiasm increases individuals' reliance on heuristic information processing that makes people stick with their preferences. As such, enthusiasm breeds loyalty and reliance on dispositional preferences. By contrast, appraisal theories of emotion differentiate a number of positive emotions, but they mostly connect them with a more general action tendency (e.g., joy should be related to aimless activation, according to Frijda, 1986). Finally, the broaden-and-build theory specifically conceptualizes positive emotions to broaden thought-action repertoires and/or build resources, including creativity, seeking out new situations, and expanding one's network (e.g., joy motivates playful behavior, whereas

<sup>10</sup>Some have treated empathy as a distinct positive emotion (e.g., Rosler et al., 2017), whereas in other work it has been treated as a psychological process associated with concern for others and perspective taking (e.g., Batson, 2011).

**Table 1.** Distinct Positive Emotions (in Terms of Form) in Three Different Theories

Positive Emotions	AI Theory	Appraisal Theories	B&B Theory
Enthusiasm	X		
Happiness		X	
Pride		X	X
Hope		X	X
Joy		X	X
Gratitude			X
Serenity			X
Interest			X
Amusement			X
Inspiration			X
Awe			X
Love			X

*Note.* AI refers to affective intelligence; B&B to broaden-and-build. Emotion terminology used corresponds with terminology used within a respective theory.

interest motivates exploration). In this sense, the three theories allow for more distinct positive emotions precisely as to enable them to serve these presumed functions.

Finally, in terms of *implications* for explaining political action, the theory of affective intelligence implies that stronger enthusiasm should increase political action, for instance, voter turnout, by locking in their loyalty to the political party or candidate already favored. Appraisal theories of emotion, however, imply that positive emotions are unlikely to foster short-term motivation for political action because their respective action tendencies are either too general or nonexistent. Finally, the broaden-and-build theory implies that the experience of distinct positive emotions has longer-term broadening and/or building functions, which can be relevant to political action.

If *interest* sparks the urge to *explore*, for example, then individuals may start to seek out information about and from political groups as a consequence of this positive emotional experience. Moreover, if inspiration sparks goal striving, then individuals may join a political action that they believe helps them to achieve that goal together with others. Furthermore, if individuals experience joy, then the urge to play may make them want to connect with others to maintain and build relationships, such as in the case of attending town hall meetings, community volunteering, and active membership in political or activist networks. However, this is not to say that all distinct positive emotions have such motivational potential. For instance, if *contentment* indeed sparks the urge to savor the experience of goal satisfaction, it seems unlikely to motivate political action, just as hope's tendency for people to think about a good future may not necessarily translate into motivating action. Thus, the different theories are comparable but have different assumptions about the form and functions of positive emotions.

### *Step 3: Evaluating Three Approaches to Positive Emotions*

Analyzable and comparable theories can be evaluated in terms of *plausibility* and *empirical support* (Van Zomeren, 2021), as to assess which one(s) might be preferred. We can differentiate *general* plausibility and support for these theories regarding positive emotions from more *specific* plausibility and support as applied to explaining political action—the main question of this article.

Let me start with general plausibility and support. In general, all three theories seem generally plausible and supported by empirical evidence. The theory of affective intelligence, for one, is embedded in broader theory and research on the neural underpinnings of emotion (e.g., Damasio, 1994), supporting the principle of affective primacy (Zajonc, 1980). This position is theoretically plausible and empirically supported, particularly from a point of view that the core of what emotions are can

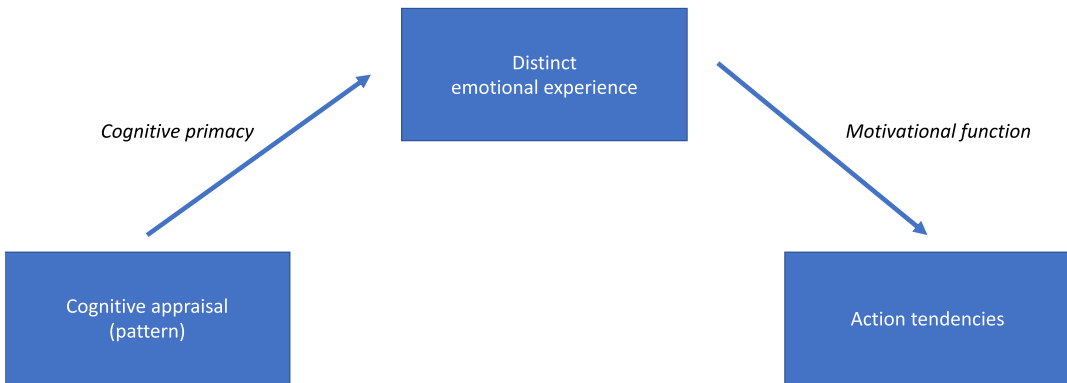
be reduced to (simple, basic) neural, affective processes. At the same time, it may be important to conceptualize emotions as something *more* than just core affect (Russell, 2009), an argument emphasized in both appraisal theories and broaden-and-build theory, in terms of a cognitive-appraisal pattern underlying the experience of the associated distinct emotion. This position is theoretically plausible and empirically supported as well, particularly from a point of view that the core of what emotions are can be reduced to (contextualized, complex) cognitive appraisal (e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; see also Roseman et al., 1990). Different from appraisal theories, however, broaden-and-build theory further posits specific, long-term functions for distinct positive emotions, which have, being a more recent development in the field (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018), also received least empirical support. Nevertheless, research has found that distinct positive emotions are associated with different cognitive appraisals (Yih et al., 2020), and different motivations (Yih et al., 2020), and are positively associated with interpersonal-relationship quality (when shared; Otero et al., 2020). As such, there is no reason to discard or single out one of the theories at this point, based on these criteria.

In terms of more *specific* plausibility (as related to implications for explaining political action), there seems to be a benefit of specifying distinct emotions in terms of cognitive appraisal patterns, as is done in the appraisal and broaden-and-build theories. Indeed, many studies suggest that the form of emotional experience follows function (Scherer et al., 2001): The experience of anger, for instance, is more likely to motivate normative forms of political action whereas contempt is more likely to motivate less normative forms of political action (e.g., Tausch et al., 2011), and sadness is unlikely to motivate political action (e.g., Smith et al., 2008). Interestingly, and also within the domain of political science, anger has been found to produce different motivational effects than anxiety (e.g., Valentino et al., 2011). There is no clear reason why such differentiation would not be beneficial in case of positive emotions (e.g., Yih et al., 2020) and hence why we would restrict positive emotions to enthusiasm, or a lumping together of positive emotions.

This plausibility of a preference for distinct emotions is strengthened by a number of studies that directly tested and found support for the presumed relationships between specific appraisals and distinct emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, contempt; Smith et al., 2008), although it is fair to say that none have directly treated and tested these appraisals as a pattern (i.e., as a coherent combination of appraisals, or cognitive “fingerprint”). A similar cognitive fingerprint is thought to underlie positive emotions, as suggested by work empirically linking hope, for example, to specific appraisals (e.g., Cohen-Chen & Van Zomeren, 2018; Van Zomeren et al., 2019). This to some extent argues against the lumping together of positive emotions in explaining political action, and against the focus of just one positive emotion.

This adds specific plausibility to the broaden-and-build theory, which is the only theory to specify the functions of distinct positive emotions. As the theory has mainly been applied and supported in the domain of personal and interpersonal processes (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018), the emphasis has been on individual well-being and flourishing (over time), which is directly linked with the presumed broaden-and-build functions of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004, 2013). The theory’s claims about these functions have received empirical support (for a review, see Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018), thus suggesting that distinct positive emotions have specific functions (in terms of, for example, creativity, novelty, and divergent thinking) that help improve well-being and resilience over time. This can easily be applied to political action, but I am not aware of any specific research doing this. As such, there is clear potential for the broaden-and-build theory to be applied to political action, but also a lacuna of empirical support.

In sum, all three approaches contribute something distinct, although in some cases seemingly contradictory (e.g., affective or cognitive primacy), to a better understanding of political action. Specifically, the theory of affective intelligence suggests that positive emotions increase one’s reliance on habits and heuristics (a position both plausible and supported), whereas appraisal theories suggest the need to differentiate positive emotions (a position equally plausible and supported). Appraisal theories do not link



**Figure 4.** Representation of a broader process model of emotion. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

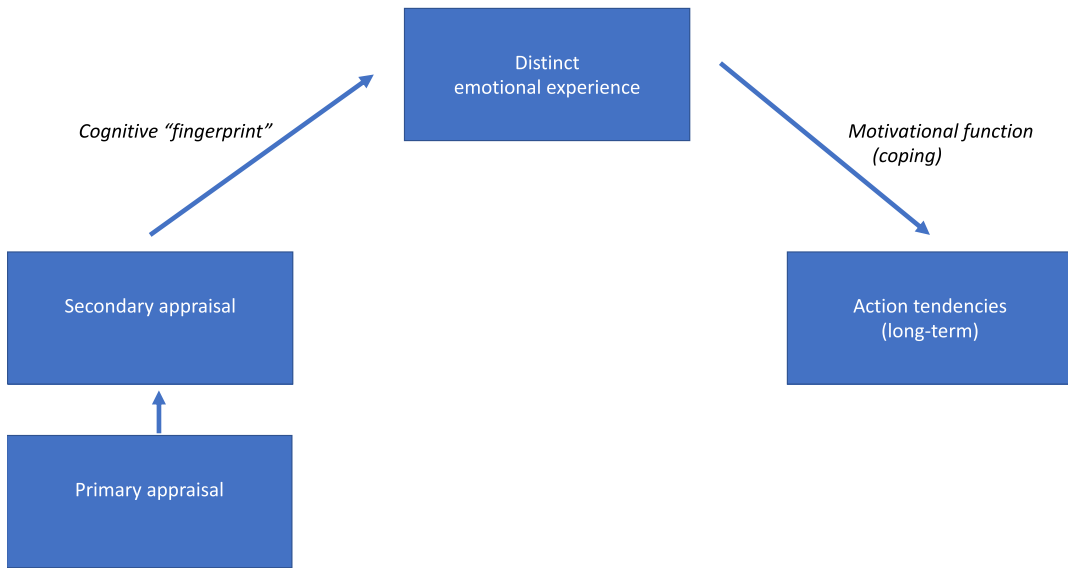
distinct positive emotions with specific functions, but broaden-and-build theory offers such a link with a unique focus on longer-term social implications of experiencing distinct positive emotions. Although the latter approach is therefore the most promising one with regard to implications for explaining political action, it also is the one with least empirical support. As such, after careful analysis, comparison, and evaluation, I conclude that none of the three approaches may be *sufficient* to understand the influence of positive emotions on political action, but they cannot all be completely right either. This raises the question whether there is scope for their synthesis (Slife & Williams, 1995; Van Zomeren, 2016b).

#### *Step 4: Synthesizing Three Approaches to Positive Emotions*

For theoretical synthesis, a common principle is needed that can connect the different approaches (Van Zomeren, 2016b, 2021). I propose that the “master key” to unlock theoretical synthesis in terms of the form and function of positive emotions for explaining political action lies in adopting the broader process model of emotion as embodied in appraisal theories of emotion. Figure 4 visualizes this process model, which differentiates between *primary* appraisal (e.g., perceiving whether a situation is stressful, threatening, or otherwise self-relevant) and *secondary* appraisal (e.g., perceiving the situation in more detail, such as in terms of blame and control, which offers guidance in how to cope with the stressor). In doing so, we move beyond the main difference between the affective intelligence theory and the other two theories, which is that it assumes different causal directions in the cognition-emotion relationship (i.e., affective or cognitive primacy). The affective intelligence theory captures mostly unconscious processes that influence our thinking, whereas appraisal theories and the broaden-and-build theory zoom in on the influence of cognitive-appraisal patterns on the resulting emotional experience—appraisals that are often more explicit and the result of conscious processing. These are not the same foci and hence are not mutually exclusive.

In fact, these are synthesized within the broader process model of emotion: First, a focus on core affect and affective primacy is not dissimilar to appraisal theories’ notion of *primary appraisal*—the process of perceiving a situation as urgent, threatening, or otherwise self-relevant for the individual (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer et al., 2001). As with core affect, primary appraisal is a cognitive, often nonconscious process. This is not unlike how affective intelligence theory describes the affective system underlying anxiety and enthusiasm, namely as indicative of anticipated risk (or threat) or reward (or goal conduciveness), both of which make the situation self-relevant to the individual.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Whether to call this primary appraisal process “cognitive” or “affective” in nature is a matter of perspective and definition. For the purpose of synthesis, I use the appraisal-theories process model and hence call it cognitive.



**Figure 5.** Integrative model. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Indeed, appraising relevance, urgency, risk, or reward affects cognitive attention and information processing.

Second, appraisal theories suggest that this triggers a process of *secondary appraisal*—the process of attending to the person-environment relationship in more detail (e.g., in terms of blame and control). This process helps shape and give more detail and depth to the specific cognitive fingerprint for the experience of distinct emotions (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer et al., 2001). Secondary appraisal is thus intimately connected to coping—the active negotiation of the relationship between the individual and the environment, of which the experience of emotions is both an expression and a motivation (Lazarus, 1991; Van Zomeren et al., 2012).

This distinction between primary and secondary appraisal helps to identify what connects affective intelligence and appraisal theories: They each focus on a *different phase* of the broader process (i.e., these apply to primary and secondary appraisal, respectively).

Where does this leave broaden-and-build theory? In line with the broader process model, this theory assumes different appraisal patterns for distinct positive emotions (e.g., Smith et al., 2014; Yih et al., 2020). But on top of this, it uniquely adds the functional consequences of experiencing distinct positive emotions. Indeed, broaden-and-build theory suggests that distinct positive emotions help to optimize human functioning in the longer run. As such, the broaden-and-build theory specifies how individuals functionally *cope* with the experience of distinct positive emotions—a process that follows the primary and secondary appraisal processes described above,<sup>12</sup> as it guides how people deal with what they appraise and feel. As positive emotions are not evoked by cognitive alarm bells that require urgent, short-term action, broaden-and-build theory offers a longer-term and social dimension to how people cope with experiencing such emotions.

Figure 5 visualizes this integrative model, in which different theories are allocated a different phase of a broader process model (for a similar synthetic approach, see Finkel et al., 2015). In

<sup>12</sup>Lazarus (1991) assumes that coping serves to promote and protect well-being. This is consistent with the focus of broaden-and-build theory on optimization and flourishing (see also Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

**Table 2.** Predictions Generated for Each Positive Emotion Identified in Broaden-and-Build Theory

Positive Emotion	Action Tendency (Thought-Action)	Predicted Relationship With Political Action (and Function)
Joy	Play	Positive (maintain and build relationships)
Gratitude	Prosocial	Positive (reciprocate support and help)
Interest	Explore	Positive (information seeking)
Inspiration	Strive	Positive (foster goal achievement)
Love	Care	Positive (relationship maintenance)
Hope	Plan for change	Null/Positive (creative planning >> potential for action)
Pride	Dream big	Null/Positive (affirm self/identity >> potential for action)
Awe	Accommodate	Null/Negative (recognize others)
Contentment	Savor	Null/Negative (feel satisfied)
Amusement	Share	Null/Negative (enjoy the moment)

*Note.* As enthusiasm is often measured with an aggregate of positive emotion terms (e.g., in Valentino et al., 2011, various terms including pride and hope were used), it is unclear what to predict. For Happiness and Serenity, the closest match is with Contentment.

the first phase, called primary appraisal, core affect may simply be the product of valence and arousal (Russell, 2009), which comes close to the emotions specified by the theory of affective intelligence. Their function is to guide attention to the situation—either because more systematic thought is needed (and further appraisal of the situation), or because all seems fine and people can rely on their existing habits and heuristics (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer et al., 2001; Van Zomeren et al., 2012).

In the second phase, a process of secondary appraisal occurs, through which it becomes clearer to the individual how to understand the situation in more detail (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer et al., 2001; Van Zomeren et al., 2012). This is where cognitive-appraisal patterns give rise to distinct emotional experiences that move beyond core affect, and which help give priority to some courses of action over others—particularly for negative emotions that signal a need for an urgent reaction (Frijda, 1986). As positive emotions may not serve a specific action function in this second phase, the third phase (coping) suggests that the experience of distinct positive emotions optimizes human functioning through broadening the mind and building social and psychological resources over time (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018).<sup>13</sup>

Does this integrative model generate new hypotheses for future research on political action to ponder and test?<sup>14</sup> It most certainly does. In fact, Table 2 outlines a set of hypotheses generated by the integrative framework about which distinct positive emotions, based on their function (Fredrickson, 2013; Weidman & Tracy, 2020; Yih et al., 2020), are more or less likely to yield a positive motivational potential for political action. Specifically, Table 2 identifies five distinct positive emotions with positive potential, two with doubtful positive potential (implying either a null or a positive relationship with political action), and three without such potential (implying either a null or even a negative relationship with political action).

<sup>13</sup>I refrain from using the term *emotion-focused* coping, because the focus of this analysis is on (positive) emotions, and because this type of coping is often understood as implying a rather passive, dysfunctional type of coping. This is a far cry from what I propose in this article. Indeed, similar to some conceptualizations of anger, then, this form of coping is best described as an emotional *approach* type of coping.

<sup>14</sup>Emerging theory and research on positive emotions suggests there may indeed be scope and potential for positive emotions to play a role in understanding political action. Landmann and Rohmann (2020), for example, found that *being moved* (moved, overwhelmed, stirred) positively predicted environmental protection intentions.



First, the experience of *joy* holds positive motivational potential because it is associated with playfully “getting involved” to build one’s social resources. One can easily imagine that political groups, campaigns, meetings, and actions may offer ample opportunities for such involvement. Similarly, *interest* holds positive motivational potential because it is associated with curiosity-driven exploration behavior such as active information seeking, which again implies a social-approach tendency toward political groups, campaigns, gatherings, and actions. Furthermore, *inspiration* is associated with positive striving for goal achievement together with others, which is related to agentic processes (such as empowerment and self-efficacy) that are key factors in explaining political action. Moreover, *gratitude* is a positive emotional experience associated with reciprocal support and help from others, which resonates with the social nature of political action in yet another way. Finally, the positive emotion of *love* is conceptualized as a positive emotional experience associated with interpersonal relationship maintenance and growth, which offers a strong motivational potential to protect significant others.

For two other distinct positive emotions, it is doubtful whether their experience holds similar potential. For *hope*, this is because its experience is focused on an unknown future and associated with plans to let currently unfulfilled goals be fulfilled in that future. In this respect, hope may have a unique cognitive function to imagine pathways to a desired future, but directly motivating political action may not be part of this function. As such, the relationship with political action is more likely to be null than positive. Similarly, the experience of *pride* is focused on positive self-evaluation and savoring this positive feeling. This, however, lacks a clear social-approach tendency and hence seems unlikely to motivate political action directly.

Finally, three distinct positive emotions are rather unlikely to yield a positive motivational potential for political action, and they may even backfire. *Contentment* and *amusement* are positive experiences that feel good and focus on enjoying the moment, which offers no particular approach motivation other than maintaining one’s positive mood. *Awe* is experienced when witnessing “vastness,” which focuses one’s attention on others’ greatness. This may have cognitive effects, such as accommodating different perspectives on oneself and the world, but again would not appear to directly motivate political action. In fact, it may even demotivate action, and hence Table 2 allows room for null as well as negative motivational effects on political action.

### Key Implications, Conceptual Questions, and Future Directions

The integrative model generates new hypotheses but also raises key questions for the field. First of all, the integrative model calls for more theorizing and research on distinct positive emotions in explaining political action. Indeed, the current analysis uncovered conceptual reasons for distinct positive emotions to have such motivational power, and the integrative model generated hypotheses that can be tested to realize their motivational potential. More theory and research along these lines will lead to a stronger appreciation of emotions in explaining political action and a better balance in terms of scientific attention paid to distinct negative as well as distinct positive emotions. In particular, emotions like joy, inspiration, and interest seem very promising candidate emotions to start studying in this field.

Another implication of the integrative model is that it helps to explain seemingly inconsistent findings in previous research. For example, research has found that hope is positively related to political action, whereas other research finds little motivational effects. To better understand these findings, one first needs to ask which specific action tendencies can be expected with regards to hope. Hope was already considered by Lazarus (1999) a “problematic” emotion, precisely because it did not seem to give precedence to specific courses of action. Similarly, Van Zomeren et al. (2019) found that experimentally increased hope did not predict political action in the context of climate change. Moreover, Cohen-Chen and Van Zomeren (2018) found across different political issues and contexts that hope, in and of itself, did not motivate political action. However, it did accommodate that individuals’ group efficacy beliefs (a secondary appraisal)

predicted political action.<sup>15</sup> The integrative model suggests that the experience of hope alone may be insufficient for motivating such action (because plans are just plans), but if the appraisal pattern of hope includes agentic beliefs to realize those plans, one may find a positive relationship between hope and political action (as also noted in Table 2).

A third implication of the integrative model is that it raises the question of how distinct positive emotions fit into broader motivational models of social protest among disadvantaged groups. For example, Włodarczyk et al. (2017) found that hope explained the effect of group efficacy beliefs on activists' willingness to engage in social protest. By contrast, Sabucedo and Vilas (2014) found that stronger positive emotions explained the effect of anger on willingness to engage in social protest. As such, it remains unclear which distinct positive emotions fit better with anger (in terms of approach motivation, perhaps) or self-efficacy beliefs (in terms of empowerment, perhaps) as motivations for collective action among disadvantaged groups.

Furthermore, one can wonder to what extent the experience of distinct positive emotions such as *pride* is associated with group identity—another key motivator for political action. Indeed, the experience of pride implies that individuals value their group identity, even if that identity is devalued in society, as is often the case with disadvantaged groups. This also fits with Páez et al. (2015), who found that participating in collective gatherings tended to increase the experience of positive emotions, and with Klar and Kasser (2009), who found that activists tend to have stronger positive emotions and (social) well-being than nonactivists. This makes pride, as noted in Table 2, a somewhat doubtful motivator of political action as it may reflect feeling good about oneself, which in and of itself could make political action irrelevant. Yet on the other hand, if feeling pride affirms the group identity that makes individuals want to act for their group, then we might expect a positive relationship between pride and political action.<sup>16</sup>

One may also wonder where enthusiasm fits in the integrative framework. In affective intelligence theory, enthusiasm is considered the only positive emotion in town, with its experience increasing heuristic processing and maintaining loyalty to political candidates (Brader, 2006; see also Redlawsk, 2006). As such, this seems to fit a cognitive function, related to types of information processing. However, this does not appear to be a broadening function, and it is also unclear whether new social resources are being built. Although this is an interesting empirical question in and of itself, in terms of theoretical interpretation, such cognitive effects of enthusiasm may more likely result from a more hedonic function, perhaps not unlike the effects that a positive mood can have (Forgas, 2017). The integrative model strongly suggests there are benefits of differentiating positive emotions in terms of form and function.

This point about hedonism raises a larger issue about positive emotions, which is whether their experience is more likely to directly motivate political action and social change (which invariably involves some form of conflict) or to “undo” or buffer negative psychological effects of, for example, group discrimination and prejudice (Fredrickson, 2013). Indeed, a potential danger of a focus on fostering positive emotions among disadvantaged group members is that such positive feelings may increase individual well-being but also increase an acceptance of the status quo. Indeed, some have argued that fostering positive attitudes toward an outgroup (i.e., prejudice reduction) will make it more difficult for people to engage in conflict-based political action for social change (Wright & Lubensky, 2008). According to the integrative model, however, this danger really lies in an undifferentiated “positive emotions” concept that generally satisfies hedonic

<sup>15</sup>Similarly, nostalgia research suggests that its experience may not directly motivate political action, but it does evoke a desired goal relevant to such action (e.g., Urbanska et al., 2021). This suggests that positive emotions like hope and nostalgia cannot be expected, in and of themselves, to have short-term effects on political action.

<sup>16</sup>Agostini and van Zomeren (2021) recently proposed that moral motivations for political action are often intertwined with group-identity motivations, because, just like identity, shared moral beliefs help to bind individuals in groups. A similar argument can thus be made for identity as for moral motivation with respect to pride.

needs, contributes to individuals' positive self-evaluation and well-being, yet offers no further signal to specific courses of action in the long run. As such, when thinking about the benefits of positive emotions experienced by disadvantaged group members, it may be wise to focus on *distinct* positive emotions that may have motivational potential for political action (see Table 2). Perhaps the experience of distinct positive emotions that have beneficial longer-term effects for disadvantaged group members, such as accumulating resources and social capital toward social change, may not be such a bad thing after all.

More broadly, the integrative model offers a blueprint for how to think about the *communication* of distinct positive emotions in the context of political action. This is pivotal as emotions like hope and joy are not just experienced, but also shared within groups and communicated to others outside the group. And in practice, positive emotions are often used in political campaigns, appeals, and movement actions, presumably to direct attention, to persuade those in doubt, and/or to mobilize supporters. Future research can use Table 2 also as a guide to examine the psychological effects of communicating distinct positive emotions such as inspiration, joy, hope, and pride (e.g., "Change we can believe in," "I have a dream..."; "Black is beautiful"; "Make love, not war"). This may also help to balance scholarly attention in this field, where there seems to be a similar predominance of studying the effects of the communication of *negative* distinct emotions (e.g., De Vos et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009).<sup>17</sup>

A final broader implication of the framework is that the distinct positive emotions outlined in Table 2 have a distinctly *relational* function (Van Zomeren, 2016b). Indeed, part of their function is to build interpersonal relationships and networks, but its application to political action suggests that positive emotions can also build relationships with groups and political movements. This is consistent with research showing positive effects of shared positive emotions in interpersonal relationships on relationship satisfaction (Otero et al., 2020). Yet this also fits with the idea of group identity functioning as "social glue" that binds individuals together in groups—a function also served by feeling a strong sense of oneness with others during a protest, and indeed a Durkheimian sense of emotional communion (Páez et al., 2015). Future theory and research should further study how the experience of positive emotions helps to build social capital through sharing these emotions with others through social interaction, and they may also call for researchers to focus on highly social forms of political action (e.g., town hall meetings, collective gatherings, mass demonstrations, campaign volunteering).

Future theorizing and research should also focus on the distinctly *longer-term* implications of experiencing distinct positive emotions in the context of political action. This is very exciting uncharted territory: Future research could focus on testing the presumed appraisal patterns and experiences of joy, inspiration, and interest (and other positive emotions) over time, together with their presumed broaden-and-build functions and participation in political action. Such longitudinal research, for instance, in the context of an election or social-movement campaign, can include measures of longer-term tendencies as well, such as network activities, creative acts, resilience, and well-being. By tracking the social dynamics of distinct positive emotions over time, we can take a considerable step forward in understanding *why* Klar and Kasser (2009) found activists to score higher than nonactivists on positive emotions and social well-being.

Finally, such a focus on tracking the relational functions of distinct positive emotions of political actors over time enables the possibility to examine more *dynamic* patterns, such as reversed causation (e.g., does participation in political action increase distinct positive emotions?). For instance, Leal et

<sup>17</sup>An important assumption here is whether the communication of a positive emotion should lead to increased positive emotion in the recipient of that communication (i.e., emotional contagion). Indeed, an angry political leader may evoke anger in his or her followers, but research suggests that sometimes such communication simply directs their attention to the message or enables them to make inferences about the communicator (e.g., Van Kleef, 2009). The same approach can be used to examine the psychological consequences of communicating positive emotions: Do people "catch" emotions such as hope or nostalgia, or do they start making inferences about the communicator (Blikmans et al., 2021)?

al. (2021) found in a two-year longitudinal study of Chilean social protests that individuals' anger positively predicted their protest behavior over time, but also that such behavior increased anger over time. Similar patterns may be examined through similar longitudinal studies on distinct positive emotions and political action, which can uniquely answer the question of whether positive emotions offer an "upward spiral" across time, as implied by the broaden-and-build theory (Figure 3).<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

Do distinct positive emotions matter for explaining political action? To answer this question, I analyzed, compared, evaluated, and synthesized three approaches to positive emotion into an integrative theoretical model about the form and function of positive emotions in explaining political action. This yielded an integrative model that generated new hypotheses and key questions for future research to consider. Although the model is untested at present, it strongly recommends studying *distinct* positive emotions (rather than lumping them together) and that these emotions may have a broaden-and-build *function* (that helps individuals to build social resources over time). If true, then a focus on distinct positive emotions holds unique potential for explaining political action. Indeed, by generating a set of testable hypotheses derived from the model, I hope to have offered a step toward a new conceptual blueprint but also to a new research agenda for the field. This may help us move closer to realizing the currently unrealized potential of distinct positive emotions to explain political action, and to better understand how, despite the dark moments that people may face, they keep their head pointed toward the sun, and their feet moving forward.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Martijn van Zomeren, Department of Social Psychology, Heymans Institute for Psychological Research, University of Groningen, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, 9712 TS Groningen, the Netherlands. E-mail: m.van.zomeren@rug.nl

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<sup>18</sup>Such studies also enable tests of whether distinct positive emotions like joy and inspiration have more motivational power for activists than for nonactivists (i.e., sympathizers). Indeed, although people may set the first steps toward political activism motivated by their negative emotions like anger in response to specific events, they may sustain and expand their participation over time through distinct positive emotions like joy—another intriguing hypothesis that awaits empirical testing.

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