

Supporting Information for
Emotional Responses to Disturbing Political News: The Role of Personality

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1. Sample Characteristics

Table SI-1

	SSI Sample	Census (2013)
White	71.3%	77.7%
Black	14.9	13.2
Asian	6.1	5.3
Other	7.6	3.8
No Diploma	2.1%	12.6%
HS Diploma	21.2	29.5
Some College	34.0	28.9
BA	28.4	18.7
Grad degree	14.3	10.2
Male	48.7%	49.2%
Female	51.3	50.8
18-29	23.4%	18.9%
30-39	19.9	17.4
40-49	17.0	18.7
50-59	18.6	18.9
60+	21.1	26.1

2. Question wording

Strength of Party Identification

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?

Strong Democrat = 1
Moderate Democrat
Lean Democrat
Independent = 0
Lean Republican
Moderate Republican
Strong Republican = 1
Other / Don't know = 0

Liberal/conservative identification

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or have you not thought about it?

Extremely liberal = 0
Somewhat liberal
Slightly liberal
Neither liberal nor conservative = .5
Slightly conservative
Somewhat conservative
Extremely conservative = 1
Don't know = missing value

Need for Affect

Response options shown for the first item only, as the rest were identical.

It is important for me to be in touch with my feelings

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

I find strong emotions overwhelming and therefore try to avoid them. (reverse coded)

I think that it is important to explore my feelings

I do not know how to handle my emotions, so I avoid them. (reverse coded)

Need for Cognition

Response options shown for the first item only, as the rest were identical.

I would prefer simple to complex problems.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.
(reverse coded)

I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

Thinking is not my idea of fun. (reverse coded)

Emotions

The emotions items were presented in a grid response, and the response options were "not at all," "slightly," "somewhat," "very," and "extremely."

How much did the article you read make you feel... [frustrated, sad, afraid, disgusted, proud, angry, outraged, anxious (as in uneasy)]?

Manipulation Check

Thinking once more about the article you read, how graphic (as in vivid, powerful) do you remember it being?

Not graphic at all

Slightly graphic

Somewhat graphic

Very graphic

Extremely graphic

Attention to politics

Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time -- whether there's an election going on, or not. Others aren't that interested. How much would you say you follow what's going on in politics?

All of the time = 1

Most of the time

Some of the time

Only now and then

Hardly at all = 0

Gender

Are you

Male = 0

Female = 1

3. Experimental Stimuli

Control Story



Sunken Ship Found Near Golden Gate Bridge

SAN FRANCISCO - The wreckage of a passenger steamship that sank in the 19th century after a collision in the San Francisco Bay has been found near the Golden Gate Bridge, officials said on Wednesday. The steamship City of Chester was discovered by researchers using sonar in waters about 216 feet deep. It was encased in mud.

"The ship is very much intact," said James Delgado, director of Maritime Heritage at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), who has investigated other shipwrecks.

A boat equipped with sonar scanners captured the first underwater images of the City of Chester last May. It took NOAA researchers nine months to review the data and reconstruct images of the ship, which came to rest upright at the edge of a sandbank, NOAA said in a statement.

High-resolution sonar imagery identified the hull of the ship rising 18 feet from the sea floor and a large gash on the vessel's left side, NOAA said.

The 202-foot long City of Chester, which was heading up the California coast to the city of Eureka, was nearly cut in half by the steamer Oceanic in August 1888.

NOAA's predecessor, the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, located the sunken ship by dragging a wire from a tugboat and snagging it, Delgado said. The last reported sighting was by a diver in 1889.

Bland Disturbing Story (Labeled “Deaths”)



Explosive Device Kills 11 American Troops in New Attack

KABUL, Afghanistan – A bomb hidden in a rickshaw exploded Saturday morning, killing eleven American soldiers, in the latest major attack focused on the continued presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. The attack stood apart from others for occurring on a weekend. For the most part, insurgents have focused their attacks on week days, with Monday through Thursday being the most likely times for a strike, and weekends being comparatively calm.

The eleven individuals killed were all American soldiers—seven from the Army, the rest Marines—who were shopping in a local bazaar. Coalition troops from Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania were also in the bazaar when the bomb exploded, as were a number of Afghan civilians. However, given where the bomb happened to be positioned, only the Americans were killed.

By afternoon, the Taliban had claimed responsibility for the attack, citing the continued presence of American troops on Afghan soil as the motivation. “There will be no stop until Afghanistan is rid of foreigners,” the group said through a spokesman.

The attack seemed calibrated to cement the Taliban’s status the best-organized organization opposing the coalition’s continued presence in Afghanistan.

Naqibullah Fayeeg, a member of the Afghan Parliament, said that during briefings he was told of three attacks planned for the province where Kabul is located. Two of the attacks were thwarted and the third of which was Saturday’s in the bazaar.

Vivid Disturbing Story (Labeled “Vivid”)



Explosive Device Kills 11 American Troops in Bloody Attack

KABUL, Afghanistan – A bomb hidden in a rickshaw exploded Saturday morning, killing eleven Americans, in the latest major attack focused on the continued presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. The attack stood apart from others for the especially gruesome scene that ensued. Shouting and sirens could be heard throughout the city for several hours after the explosion, and workers were summoned to clear smoldering wreckage, blood, and body parts.

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By afternoon, the Taliban had claimed responsibility for the attack, citing the continued presence of American troops on Afghan soil as the motivation. “There will be no stop until Afghanistan is rid of foreigners,” the group said through a spokesman.

The attack seemed calibrated to cement the Taliban’s status as an organization ready to employ horrific methods to achieve its ends.

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Vivid Disturbing Story with Photo (Labeled "Photo")



Explosive Device Kills 11 American Troops in Bloody Attack

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Blood trickled down Kabul streets following Saturday's explosion.

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4. Manipulation Check Results

Table A2 reports the results of our manipulation check. In terms of objective intensity, the stories had the expected rank ordering, and all conditions are statistically distinct from each other. They increase intensity at a steady rate. (Each step up increases graphicness between .06 and .08 on a 0-1 scale.) The level of graphicness in the most intense condition (.54) is well below our scale's theoretical upper bound of 1, but it reflects a response between "somewhat" and "very" graphic, which is perhaps the most that can be expected while honoring research ethics, mimicking the family-friendly sensibilities of professional journalism, and not invoking an exceptionally disturbing event such as 9/11. We examined whether individuals high in NFA perceived more objective intensity than subjects low in NFA. If they did, it would subtly change what conclusions we could draw from different levels of emotional arousal: being high in NFA might correlate with a different conceptual understanding of what constitutes a vivid, intense message. But NFA did not predict differences in the manipulation check measure.²

Table SI-2: Results of Manipulation Check

	Graphicness
Control	0.34 (.02)
Deaths	0.40 (.02)
Vivid	0.48 (.02)
Photo	0.54 (.01)

Mean level of reported graphicness of news article, by condition. Graphicness is coded from 0 = Not graphic at all to 1 = Extremely graphic Standard errors in parentheses. All differences are significant at $p < .01$.

² We regress the graphicness measure on indicators for each treatment condition, interacted with NFA. None of the interactions are significant. (The smallest p-value is .44.)

5. Full regression results

Table A3 below reports both sparse and rich regression models we use to test the statistical significance of the treatment \times NFA interactions, and to compare these interactions to those of other measures. In these models, Disturbing is a dummy variable that takes a value of 0 for subjects assigned to the Control condition, and 1 for all other subjects.

Table SI-3: Need for Affect Moderates Emotional Arousal

	<u>Disgust</u>		<u>Sad</u>		<u>Angry</u>		<u>Outrage</u>	
<i>Main Effects</i>								
Disturbing	0.343***	0.261**	0.237**	0.080	0.339***	0.205	0.296***	0.146
	(0.094)	(0.127)	(0.096)	(0.128)	(0.095)	(0.125)	(0.097)	(0.128)
Need Affect	-0.124	-0.103	-0.008	0.033	-0.111	-0.102	-0.182	-0.152
	(0.118)	(0.126)	(0.120)	(0.128)	(0.119)	(0.125)	(0.122)	(0.128)
Need Cognition		-0.065		-0.095		-0.055		-0.078
		(0.144)		(0.146)		(0.142)		(0.146)
Follow Politics		0.081		0.008		0.122		0.105
		(0.077)		(0.078)		(0.076)		(0.078)
Party ID Strength		0.045		0.070		0.026		0.038
		(0.057)		(0.058)		(0.056)		(0.058)
Ideology (Conservative)		-0.024		-0.061		0.010		-0.038
		(0.071)		(0.072)		(0.070)		(0.071)
Female		-0.070		-0.054		-0.092**		-0.089**
		(0.044)		(0.045)		(0.043)		(0.045)
<i>Interactions</i>								
Disturbing								
\times NFA	0.331**	0.279**	0.291**	0.243*	0.298**	0.291**	0.346**	0.342**
	(0.133)	(0.141)	(0.135)	(0.144)	(0.134)	(0.140)	(0.136)	(0.143)
\times NFC		-0.007		-0.019		-0.007		-0.077
		(0.161)		(0.163)		(0.159)		(0.163)
\times Follow Politics		0.109		0.194**		0.091		0.105
		(0.088)		(0.090)		(0.087)		(0.089)
\times Party ID Strength		-0.050		-0.029		-0.007		0.000
		(0.063)		(0.064)		(0.062)		(0.064)
\times Ideology		0.060		0.094		0.110		0.171**
		(0.079)		(0.080)		(0.078)		(0.080)
\times Female		0.100**		0.102**		0.091*		0.104**
		(0.049)		(0.050)		(0.049)		(0.050)
Constant	0.207**	0.203*	0.293***	0.334***	0.202**	0.176	0.248***	0.251**
	(0.084)	(0.112)	(0.086)	(0.114)	(0.085)	(0.111)	(0.087)	(0.114)
N	945	910	945	910	945	910	945	910
R-squared	0.389	0.415	0.271	0.306	0.362	0.415	0.345	0.393

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests

OLS models. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables coded to run 0-1.

Table continues on the next page.

Table SI-3 (Continued)

	<u>Frustration</u>		<u>Anxiety</u>		<u>Afraid</u>		<u>Proud</u>	
<i>Main Effects</i>								
Disturbing	0.217** (0.097)	0.110 (0.130)	0.158 (0.102)	0.121 (0.138)	0.090 (0.099)	0.052 (0.133)	0.096 (0.095)	0.060 (0.128)
Need Affect	-0.184 (0.122)	-0.171 (0.129)	-0.024 (0.128)	-0.022 (0.138)	-0.155 (0.124)	-0.108 (0.133)	0.081 (0.119)	0.043 (0.127)
Need Cognition		0.038 (0.148)		0.067 (0.157)		-0.054 (0.152)		0.095 (0.146)
Follow Politics		0.071 (0.079)		0.123 (0.084)		0.084 (0.081)		0.170** (0.078)
Party ID Strength		0.053 (0.058)		0.039 (0.062)		0.049 (0.060)		-0.023 (0.057)
Ideology (Conservative)		-0.050 (0.072)		-0.042 (0.077)		-0.041 (0.074)		-0.022 (0.071)
Female		-0.088* (0.045)		-0.089* (0.048)		-0.104** (0.047)		-0.060 (0.044)
<i>Interactions</i>								
Disturbing								
× NFA	0.376*** (0.137)	0.333** (0.145)	0.192 (0.144)	0.182 (0.154)	0.185 (0.139)	0.149 (0.149)	-0.326** (0.133)	-0.287** (0.143)
× NFC		-0.076 (0.165)		-0.141 (0.176)		-0.109 (0.170)		-0.047 (0.162)
× Follow Politics		0.157* (0.090)		0.045 (0.096)		0.026 (0.093)		-0.084 (0.089)
× Party ID Strength		-0.004 (0.065)		-0.001 (0.069)		0.010 (0.066)		0.119* (0.063)
× Ideology		0.069 (0.081)		0.053 (0.086)		0.004 (0.084)		0.040 (0.080)
× Female		0.096* (0.050)		0.129** (0.054)		0.188*** (0.052)		0.017 (0.050)
Constant	0.268*** (0.087)	0.239** (0.115)	0.172* (0.091)	0.110 (0.122)	0.228** (0.089)	0.226* (0.118)	0.235*** (0.085)	0.161 (0.113)
N	945	910	945	910	945	910	945	910
R-squared	0.295	0.332	0.125	0.153	0.078	0.114	0.046	0.083

*p<.1 **p<05 *** p<.01, two-tailed tests

OLS models. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables coded to run 0-1

6. Alternative Need-for-Cognition Measure

The following table was constructed because of the low reliability of the 4-item need-for-cognition measure that we employ. It replicates Table 2 in the paper. (Specifically, it replicates the “with controls” models in Table 2. The other models do not include need for cognition, so would not change.) The table substitutes the two naturally-coded need-for-cognition items ($\alpha=.70$) for unreliable ($\alpha=.29$) the 4-item battery.

Table SI-4

	Disgust	Sad	Angry	Outrage	Frustrated	Anxiety	Afraid	Proud
Disturbing	0.376*** (0.121)	0.227* (0.123)	0.324*** (0.119)	0.253** (0.123)	0.175 (0.124)	0.156 (0.132)	0.069 (0.128)	0.041 (0.120)
Need Affect	-0.139 (0.121)	-0.012 (0.123)	-0.141 (0.119)	-0.196 (0.123)	-0.183 (0.124)	-0.033 (0.131)	-0.144 (0.127)	0.040 (0.120)
Disturbing × Need Affect	0.296** (0.136)	0.257* (0.137)	0.315** (0.133)	0.346** (0.137)	0.336** (0.139)	0.177 (0.147)	0.147 (0.143)	-0.264** (0.134)
Control for other traits?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	910	910	910	910	910	910	910	910
R-squared	0.418	0.311	0.419	0.394	0.336	0.164	0.121	0.123

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

OLS models. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables coded to run 0-1

7. Accounting for Measurement Uncertainty

As Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2013) discuss, Bayesian methods allow researchers to account for measurement error—and how it propagates through statistical models—in a principled way. As a check on our results, we implement a similar approach here.

Let \mathbf{X} be the matrix of responses to the four NFA and four NFC items, such that x_i is the i 'th respondent's answer to each of the $p=8$ questions. We express the $1 \times p$ response vector as:

$$x_i = \Lambda \phi_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where Λ is a $p \times k$ matrix of factor loadings, ϕ_i is the i 'th respondent's latent positions on the k factors, and ε_i is the error. We assume $\varepsilon_i \sim \text{Multivariate Gaussian}(\mathbf{0}, \Psi)$, where Ψ is a diagonal, positive-definite matrix of variances. An individual's response vector, then, is a linear combination of his or her latent positions, the loading of the items on those positions, and random error. The Λ loadings are assumed to follow a multivariate Gaussian distribution and the ϕ_i are i.i.d. drawn from a univariate normal distribution. Based on prior research, we fit the model using $k=2$ latent dimensions, but the results do not substantively change by letting $k = 3$.

To simplify the specification, we assume *a priori* independence between the ϕ_i , and between ϕ and Λ and Ψ . We use weakly informative conjugate prior distributions:

$$\phi_i \sim \text{Gaussian}(\mu_0, \sigma^2)$$

$$\Lambda_j | \Psi \sim \text{Gaussian}(g_{0j}, G_{0j})$$

$$\psi_{jj} \sim \text{Inverse Gamma}(a_0, b_0)$$

We fix a_0 and b_0 to be arbitrarily small values such that the prior distribution has high variance. We fix μ_0 to zero and variance equal to 1 for identification purposes. And we incorporate some prior knowledge about the items by constraining the loadings of NFA items onto dimension 2 to be zero, and the converse for NFC items. In other words, we use truncated Gaussian priors to map NFA items onto the same dimension, and the same for NFC items. We set the prior with reasonably large variance (20), however; this helps to smooth the parameter space without being overly informative. Conjugacy allows us to draw 10,000 samples from the joint posterior using a Gibbs sampler. Convergence of all FA models was confirmed using primarily the Heidelberg diagnostic and visual inspection of the Markov chain trace plots.

To incorporate the factor analysis results fully into the model specification—in order to account for variation and measurement error in the NFA and NFC indices—we follow

Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2013) and fit the linear model repeatedly using samples from the posterior. After accounting for burn-in (which allows for the sampler to converge to the posterior distribution) and thinning (which reduces autocorrelation between draws), we store 1,000 posterior samples.

Table A3 below reports a replication of Table 2 in the main text using a Bayesian linear model, with the caveat that at each iteration, we use a new draw from the posterior distribution of individuals' factor scores instead of the fixed NFA and NFC indices. The results largely match those in Table 2. Asterisks mark estimates whose 95% Credible Interval does not cross zero.

Table SI-5: Need for Affect Moderates Emotional Arousal

	Disgust	Sad	Angry
<i>Main Effects</i>			
Disturbing	0.448*	0.239*	0.405*
	[0.29,0.60]	[0.09,0.38]	[0.26,0.56]
Need Affect	-0.152	-0.120	-0.188*
	[-0.35,0.05]	[-0.32,0.08]	[-0.37,0.00]
Need Cognition	0.196*	0.199*	0.226*
	[0.03,0.20]	[0.03,0.20]	[0.07,0.37]
Follow Politics	0.035	-0.025	0.073
	[-0.11,0.18]	[-0.18,0.13]	[-0.09,0.21]
Party ID Strength	0.029	0.049	0.005
	[-0.09,0.14]	[-0.07,0.17]	[-0.11,0.12]
Ideology (Conservative)	0.018	-0.019	0.065
	[-0.12,0.16]	[-0.16,0.12]	[-0.08,0.20]
Female	-0.045	-0.021	-0.063
	[-0.13,0.04]	[-0.11,0.06]	[-0.15,0.03]
<i>Interactions</i>			
Disturbing			
× NFA	0.225*	0.245*	0.293*
	[0.01,0.46]	[0.01,0.050]	[0.10,0.50]
× NFC	-0.241*	-0.289*	-0.263*
	[-0.43,-0.12]	[-0.45,-0.12]	[-0.45,0.07]
× Follow Politics	0.163	0.243*	0.148
	[-0.01,0.34]	[0.06,0.41]	[-0.02,0.33]
× Party ID Strength	-0.030	0.001	0.019
	[-0.15,0.10]	[-0.13,0.13]	[-0.10,0.15]
× Ideology	-0.003	0.031	0.043
	[-0.16,0.16]	[-0.12,0.18]	[-0.11,0.20]
× Female	0.081	0.076*	0.064
	[-0.02,0.18]	[-0.02,0.18]	[-0.03,0.16]
Constant	0.093	0.293*	0.068
	[-0.03,0.21]	[0.17,0.42]	[-0.06,0.19]
N	910	910	910

* 95% Credible Interval does not cross 0.

OLS models. Coefficients are posterior means. 95% Credible Intervals in brackets. Table continues on the next page.

Table SI-5 (continued): Need for Affect Moderates Emotional Arousal

	Outrage	Frustration	Afraid
<i>Main Effects</i>			
Disturbing	0.333*	0.297*	0.107
	[0.19,0.48]	[0.14,0.44]	[-0.05,0.26]
Need Affect	-0.228*	-0.217*	-0.189
	[-0.45,-0.01]	[-0.44,0.00]	[-0.40,0.01]
Need Cognition	0.221*	0.197*	0.229*
	[0.06,0.38]	[0.04,0.36]	[0.05,0.41]
Follow Politics	0.052	0.035	0.038
	[-0.10,0.20]	[-0.13,0.19]	[-0.13,0.20]
Party ID Strength	0.014	0.033	0.026
	[-0.10,0.13]	[-0.08,0.15]	[-0.09,0.14]
Ideology (Conservative)	0.014	-0.008	0.005
	[-0.13,0.16]	[-0.16,0.14]	[-0.15,0.16]
Female	-0.061	-0.062	-0.075
	[-0.16,0.03]	[-0.15,0.03]	[-0.18,0.02]
<i>Interactions</i>			
Disturbing			
× NFA	0.257*	0.277*	0.096
	[0.05,0.46]	[0.08,0.48]	[-0.12,0.32]
× NFC	-0.266*	-0.207*	-0.163*
	[-0.52,-0.01]	[-0.39,-0.02]	[-0.33,0.00]
× Follow Politics	0.163	0.203*	0.054
	[-0.01,0.35]	[0.03,0.39]	[-0.12,0.24]
× Party ID Strength	0.032	0.018	0.026
	[-0.10,0.16]	[-0.11,0.15]	[-0.10,0.15]
× Ideology	0.109	0.017	-0.039
	[-0.04,0.27]	[-0.15,0.18]	[-0.12,0.13]
× Female	0.083	0.075	0.165*
	[-0.02,0.19]	[-0.03,0.18]	[0.07,0.27]
Constant	0.104	0.137*	0.118
	[-0.03,0.24]	[0.01,0.28]	[-0.02,0.25]
N	910	910	910

* 95% Credible Interval does not cross zero.

OLS models. Coefficients are posterior means. 95% Credible Intervals in brackets. Table continues on the next page.

Table SI-5 (continued): Need for Affect Moderates Emotional Arousal

	Anxiety	Proud
<i>Main Effects</i>		
Disturbing	0.178* [0.02,0.35]	-0.137 [-0.28,0.01]
Need Affect	-0.124 [-0.32,0.08]	-0.028 [-0.23,0.17]
Need Cognition	0.241* [0.07,0.41]	0.200* [0.04,0.37]
Follow Politics	0.086 [-0.09,0.26]	0.145* [0.00,0.29]
Party ID Strength	0.018 [-0.11,0.13]	-0.035 [-0.14,0.07]
Ideology (Conservative)	-0.003 [-0.16,0.16]	0.002 [-0.14,0.14]
Female	-0.060 [-0.16,0.03]	-0.034 [-0.13,0.05]
<i>Interactions</i>		
Disturbing		
× NFA	0.123 [-0.11,0.37]	-0.140 [-0.36,0.08]
× NFC	-0.185* [-0.37,0.00]	-0.025 [-0.19,0.14]
× Follow Politics	0.076 [-0.13,0.27]	-0.091 [-0.26,0.08]
× Party ID Strength	0.14 [-0.11,0.14]	0.110 [-0.01,0.23]
× Ideology	0.044 [-0.17,0.17]	0.043 [-0.12,0.20]
× Female	0.112* [0.01,0.22]	-0.012 [-0.10,0.08]
Constant	0.124 [-0.02,0.27]	0.235* [0.11,0.36]
N	910	910

* 95% Credible Interval does not cross zero.

OLS models. Coefficients are posterior means. 95% Credible Intervals in brackets.