6 Conclusion: Current Evidence and Future Directions in Research on Politicians' Emotion Expressions

6.1 Summary of Empirical Findings

This section summarizes the empirical findings and discusses them in light of the initial theoretical expectations. In addition to this summary, the limitations of this study are discussed and directions for future research on emotional expressions of political leaders are highlighted based on the presented findings.

This book set out to investigate the impact that politicians' expressions of anger have on citizens. The results of this investigation show that in most instances the emotional expressions of politicians, even the negative emotional expressions of anger, only induced slight changes in their evaluation, if at all. One exception in this study is the anger expressed by Gregor Gysi, which led to more substantial changes in his evaluation.

The first noticeable observation from this study is that most emotional expressions of politicians did not lead to substantial changes in their evaluation. Overall, it can be said that the effects for the three political leaders were fairly small, but more noticeable than those for male and female politicians as social groups. The most noticeable effects can be found for anger expressions by Gregor Gysi, followed by the effects on Angela Merkel's evaluations if participants also saw Gysi's anger. Nonetheless, more research into these contextual effects is needed, since they can shape the evaluation of politicians.

The effects of anger expressions for politicians as a social group are not significant in most instances, except for certain character traits that are more closely related to emotional expressions, such as being evaluated as emotional or agitated. However, none of the measurements that are commonly used to measure candidate orientation such as warmth and competence were affected by the anger expressions of male and female politicians.

The third major finding is that the impact of anger expressions depended on the status of the politicians – whether they were part of the government or opposition. For Gregor Gysi, leader of the opposition within the German Bundestag at the time of the experiment, anger expressions mainly increased his ratings in all aspects of his character traits – warmth and

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competence. In contrast to these more favorable ratings, Angela Merkel's anger led to less positive evaluations – at least when participants were also exposed to Gysi's anger.

Ethological assumptions about the status of political leaders predict that politicians who hold power are best advised to display positive emotional expressions, such as happiness/reassurance, while politicians of the opposition could gain power by displaying anger/threat (Bucy & Grabe 2008: 84). The positive impact that Gysi's anger expressions had on his evaluation are in line with this assumption, as well as the negative evaluation of Angela Merkel's anger expressions by participants who also saw Gysi's anger expressions. The negative effects for Angela Merkel were not replicated when participants also saw Sigmar Gabriel's anger and uncivil behavior. In addition, Sigmar Gabriel's expressions had hardly any effect on the participants. It can be argued, however, that viewers might have had less clear expectations of his behavior: the video material was partially taken from news reporting on the election campaign of 2013 when Sigmar Gabriel was a politician of the opposition and attacking CDU politicians, yet he was part of the government – a grand coalition – at the time of the experiment.

In addition to the status of the politicians within the political system, this finding could be due to several reasons. It is also likely that gender stereotype expectations play a role in the assessment of these political leaders, particularly the negative evaluation of Angela Merkel by participants who also saw Gregor Gysi. Previous research has shown that negative emotional expressions by female politicians can have negative consequences for their evaluation as politicians and are therefore not advisable (Hess 2014: 70). However, if gender stereotype expectations play a role, this negative effect for Angela Merkel should have also occurred when participants were exposed to a video of Sigmar Gabriel's incivility in addition to her expressions of anger. Therefore, gender expectations might not necessarily explain the evaluation of the anger expressions of these three well-known politicians. As a more likely explanation, the findings indicate that politicians are evaluated in relation to each other.

Because voting decisions require a choice for one candidate and against another candidate (Redlawsk & Lau 2013: 131), comparative evaluations of political candidates are considered to be central aspects of electoral decisions (Rahn et al. 1990: 155). An empirical study on candidates' physical attractiveness has found that candidates are evaluated in relation to each other, by looking at the physical attractiveness of political candidates within the same constituency (Rosar et al. 2008). The authors conclude that

candidate characteristics such as attractiveness affect voters in relative terms: candidates benefit from being more attractive than their direct competition within the same constituency (Rosar et al. 2008). Hence, the comparative assessment of politicians can also extend to their emotional expressions. Although such effects are not built on strong theoretical assumptions and were only tested as potential priming effects of one politician, they were considered as potential factors and indeed present one of the central findings of this research. This finding is particularly relevant for understanding the outcome of elections and election campaigns, since voters are likely to evaluate leading politicians in comparison to each other, meaning that it might often be sufficient to appear to voters as favorable in relative rather than in absolute terms. Therefore, further research is needed into the factors that determine how and when politicians are evaluated in relation to each other. Gender stereotypical expectations can play a crucial role when politicians are evaluated in such relative terms.

This comparative assessment of politicians' emotional displays is an important finding. Future studies could focus on the nonverbal communication of politicians at public events during election campaigns. Particularly emotional expressions of politicians in TV debates should be analyzed in addition to the topics and their appearances to gain further insight into when a politician is deemed to be the winner of an argument – or even the debate as a whole.

The specific order in which politicians were seen revealed that the order of candidate appearances and displays of anger influenced their evaluation in certain instances. It could be shown that politicians might have a slight advantage by appearing first. This primacy effect could be due to an anchor heuristic that influences the processing of all subsequent information (Tversky & Kahneman 1974: 1128).

In regard to the candidate evaluation along the dimensions of warmth and competence, this study only partially supports the idea that anger expressions are beneficial for the evaluation of politicians' competence but not their warmth. For politicians as a social group, and for Angela Merkel when participants also saw Sigmar Gabriel, anger expressions did not have a significant impact on their candidate evaluations according to the overall rating, warmth, and competence. When participants also saw Gregor Gysi, Merkel's warmth and her problem-solving capabilities were evaluated less positively, while her leadership skills were not evaluated differently. Sigmar Gabriel's warmth was not affected significantly by his anger expressions, while his competence ratings – based on his leadership skills – improved after participants saw his incivility. This finding for Sigmar

Gabriel's incivility is in accordance with the previous findings of research on anger and dominance evaluations, unlike the findings for Gregor Gysi's anger.

When focusing on the political leaders as case studies, the varying effects for Gysi and Gabriel provide further empirical support for the idea that anger has a positive and a negative side (Hess 2014). Both sides evoke different responses in viewers. By analyzing the political messages in depth, it could be shown that Gysi's and Gabriel's anger expressions represented the two sides of anger: positive anger (moral outrage) versus incivility (personal attacks).

The analysis revealed that Gregor Gysi's expressions of anger and indignation led to an overall positive evaluation of his personality traits – positively impacting his warmth as well as his competence. This finding can be explained by the social function of his anger expressions. If anger is seen as a social function signaling to citizens how strongly a political leader cares about them, then this kind of political empathy (Kinder 1986: 241) could also have a positive effect on politicians' warmth. Gysi expressed his anger and indignation in regard to topics of social welfare, minimum wage, and education. Being in favor of those social policies and stressing social justice shows an empathetic response and compassion – qualities belonging to the dimension of warmth (see also Hess 2014: 63). Hence, it is not a surprise that his expressions of anger led to more favorable evaluations of warmth given the specific content of his messages.

Furthermore, this can also explain why Sigmar Gabriel's incivility did not lead to higher ratings of his warmth, since attacking opponents does not signal political empathy. This finding strongly indicates that the evaluations of anger expressions are strongly dependent on the source and target of one's anger, whether it is directed at a political opponent or caused by political issues. The findings are also in line with previous experimental research (Van't Riet et al. 2019) and by analyzing the three case studies, this book provides insights on the conditions that result in anger evoking backlash effects, as well as when it can foster support for politicians. Future research should be conducted to analyze anger expressions in relation to several political issues as well as valence and position issues.

In addition to the main effects for the experimental treatment, this study hypothesized that individual factors might shape the way in which citizens evaluate anger expressions. First and foremost, for the politicians under investigation, party identification did not add much to the explanation of individual reactions. This finding can be the result of several factors.

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It is likely that a ceiling effect occurred for the evaluation of Angela Merkel. Supporters of the CDU evaluated her favorably in the pre-test condition (Wave 1), which was conducted in March 2015. Hence, a ceiling effect might be the reason why supporters of the CDU did not respond more positively to her anger expressions, when evaluating her competence. Similarly, supporters of the Left rated Gregor Gysi very favorably at the beginning of the experiment. Therefore, a ceiling effect can explain why supporters of the Left did not respond with more favorable evaluations than those who did not support the Left. However, his appearances appealed to a broader audience, so that those participants who did not identify with the Left evaluated him more favorably than they initially had. One further indication that the individual party identification made a difference is found when focusing on Sigmar Gabriel's anger. While it did not affect SPD supporters negatively, his anger led to less favorable evaluations for participants who supported another party or no party at all. The evaluation of politicians as a social group was not affected by whether participants supported any political party in comparison to the lack of party identification.

Whereas the individual party identification partially influenced the evaluation of politicians, no empirical evidence could be obtained for moderating effects of underlying personal traits such as neuroticism. A more finely tuned approach to measure personal attitudes towards conflict and verbal disagreements could be undertaken in future studies.

Taken together, these findings suggest a role for anger expressions in shaping candidate evaluations that moves beyond party labels. In addition, the relevance of these findings for electoral choices can be considered beyond the candidate evaluation itself. In order to test potential spillover effects of candidate evaluation onto party evaluations, the evaluation of the CDU, SPD, and the Left was measured after participants saw the video clips. No spillover effect occurred for Angela Merkel's negative-active emotional expressions, while the evaluation of the Left was affected by any exposure to Gregor Gysi, and therefore not particularly related to his anger expressions. For the SPD and Sigmar Gabriel, however, a negative spillover effect of his incivility occurred when participants stated that they did not support the SPD. Negative ratings of the Social Democratic Party did not occur for those who identified with the SPD.

These empirical findings extend the knowledge of viewers' attitude formation to effects of emotional expressions by political leaders. Until now, experimental studies have rarely dealt with the longevity of experimental effects, particularly so in regard to attitude formation. This study however

administered the same questionnaire one week after the experimental treatment occurred. By doing so, it could be shown that the positive attitude changes towards Gregor Gysi's warmth were still present within the experimental groups, and though the effects had diminished, they were still significantly higher than the assessment before the experiment was conducted. Gysi's warmth evaluation is the only case in which these longer lasting effects occurred. In all other instances, the treatment effects had disappeared after one week. Meaningful and continuing exposure to political leaders and their emotional expressions could influence the evaluation of their political parties more permanently.

6.2 Concluding Remarks and Implications for Future Research

One factor that has not yet been discussed is the individual emotional expressivity of politicians. Their emotional expressivity can affect how they are perceived and evaluated (Peterson et al. 2018). In order to evoke a shift in candidate evaluations, the emotional expressions have to be processed by voters – consciously or unconsciously. Angela Merkel is known for her lack of emotional expressivity (Mölders et al. 2017: 119). Neutral appearances, however, are advisable for female political leaders (Hess 2014: 70) and might account for her public perception as a rational leader rather than a gender stereotypical assessment as a warm but less competent woman (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001: 783). The extensive data collection for suitable video material of Merkel's anger expressions is consistent with her public perception as being less expressive emotionally. In order to gather sufficient video material within the time frame of the data collections, CDU party conventions and speeches within the Bundestag that aired on Phoenix were screened. The political talk shows, which aired during the period of the media content analysis, provided sufficient video material for Gregor Gysi and Sigmar Gabriel. While all three video clips of the emotional expressions were coded as anger, the external classification showed that according to their facial expressions, Merkel showed anger in fewer frames and with a lower maximum probability than Gysi (40.6 percent vs. 81.1 percent). This difference is also reflected in the percentages of participants who self-reported their perceptions of the anger expressions by Merkel and Gysi (35.0 percent vs. 61.5 percent, see Subchapter 4.5). This might further indicate that there are differences in the emotional expressivity of these politicians which could have affected the evaluation of the politicians.

Because the scope of this study was limited to the evaluation of politicians based on their emotional expressions, it was not feasible to test the underlying causal mechanism extensively. The online survey experiments included measures of self-reported cognitive and affective reactions towards the video clips. However, this study did not include any additional experiments using physiological measurements of arousal, eye-tracking measures to determine the attention directed towards the video, or recording equipment in order to track signs of emotional contagion in respondents' facial expressions.

While such measurements can be undertaken in future research, this survey experiment was limited to self-reported measures of perceived emotional expressions and self-reported affective states. Self-reports of emotions and their perceptions have been discussed in the psychological literature as being challenging for participants (Siegert et al. 2011). Hence, measurement errors are likely to occur. From a theoretical standpoint, self-reports of emotions and perceived emotional expressions pose a significant challenge, since emotional expressions can influence participants as micro-expressions that might not be detected consciously. Research has shown that emotional expressions can be processed consciously as well as pre-consciously or even unconsciously (Brader & Marcus 2013: 167–168; Ksiazkiewicz et al. 2018).

Due to the online nature of this survey experiment, however, it was possible to analyze participants' response times as an indication of fast and slow judgments. By analyzing these response times, it could be shown that expressions of anger did not necessarily lead to longer response times, since the response times depended on how familiar participants were with the politicians initially. In comparison to the control group without video treatment, Gysi's evaluation was given more thought if participants saw him in a video clip, regardless of the emotional expressions displayed. This effect did not occur for Angela Merkel, since participants took more time to rate her character traits if they did not see a video clip. These response times could indicate cognitive processes based on available – maybe even unexpected – information, whereby the nature of emotional expressions did not make a difference. Participants who saw anger expressions did not respond significantly faster. Nonetheless, the response time analysis of various politicians indicates that some underlying cognitive processes were at stake, even though the varying kinds of emotional expressions did not have a systematic effect. In addition, the analysis could not support the assumption that deeper processing is evoked by potentially irritating video clips; this was measured by the analysis of response times for the evaluation of

Gregor Gysi for those who did not support the Left and reacted positively towards the video clips. According to cognitive theories of information processing, feelings of irritation or uncertainty due to unexpected enthusiasm about candidates of another party could have led to longer response times; however, such an effect could not be found for those who reacted positively towards Gysi's anger expressions. Nonetheless, the finding is in line with previous research on exposure, whereby larger attitude changes can be expected if participants have not been highly familiarized with the stimulus (Zajonc 1968).

In addition to assessments of politicians as a social group, this study focused on potential attitude changes due to emotional expressions of three leading politicians, all belonging to political parties in the German Bundestag at the time of the investigation. Therefore, the findings for these three politicians can only be interpreted as case studies of attitudinal changes towards leading politicians. While future research could also incorporate changes in hypothetical electoral behavior in addition to attitudinal changes, fundamentally more research into emotional expressions of further politicians within the political system is needed. Further studies should consider how anger expressions by a leading female politician of the opposition are perceived, and whether existing gender stereotypes about displaying anger (Hess 2014: 70) are stronger than any positive impact anger might have. Given that social injustice is the target of anger, anger expressions by Sahra Wagenknecht or Amira Mohamed Ali (former and current Co-leader of the Left in the Bundestag, respectively) could be used as a comparison to Gregor Gysi's expressions of anger and indignation. If video clips regarding similar issues were chosen, a comparison between both politicians might give further insights into how anger of female politicians of the opposition is evaluated. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that people and therefore politicians have a unique individual expressiveness and so their neutral appearances have to be taken into consideration as a control group in order to avoid over-estimating the effects of emotional expressions. Future studies are well advised to treat politicians as specific case studies and measure their baseline emotional expressivity in public appearance as a point of comparison for any treatment effects.

One aim of this study was to replicate previous findings from American and French samples in the context of German politics, in which election campaigns have been previously described as tame (Tenscher 2013). It could be shown that within the context of German politics, emotional expressions of anger influence viewers; in particular, anger and indignation

of the opposition was well received, while expressions of incivility hardly had any positive impact for Sigmar Gabriel. This finding further extends to the study of populism. The Left has been classified as a left-wing populist party by political scientists (e.g., Bakker et al. 2016a; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017); therefore, the anger expressions of a left-wing politician can be seen in light of populist appeals to voters. Criticism aimed at the status quo is one way of gaining support for parties of the opposition, but hardly possible for politicians of governing parties that are (partially) responsible for the current legislation. Thus, these findings might also translate to the study of anger expressions by right-wing populists. This route could be taken in subsequent empirical research studies.

This study has neglected the recent populist developments within Germany that have resulted in success for the Alternative for Germany (AfD), on the state level and more recently on the national level, with a vote share of 12.6 percent in the general election 2017. Specifically, the anger expressions that are shown by right-wing populist politicians in regard to the recent migrant crisis have not been under investigation in this study. These anger expressions might appeal to a certain part of the population, one which agrees with the political agenda and potentially repulses others who disagree with right-wing and extreme right-wing positions. In contrast to the findings of this study, party identification and political ideology and political self-positioning could potentially have a stronger impact on the evaluation of political candidates based on their anger expressions in regard to controversial issues such as the migration crisis. Hence, before the anger expressions of populist politicians are studied using experimental methods, it might be beneficial to apply blocking techniques in order to investigate the impact those expressions have on supporters and non-supporters or left-wing and right-wing voters, rather than an average treatment effect on a diverging issue (Gerber & Green 2012: 109–115). Such an approach is especially beneficial if convenience samples are used. Expressions of anger by right-wing leading male and female politicians should be studied to see what role gender stereotypes play. Additionally, Alice Weidel (leader of the AfD in the German Bundestag and female AfD lead in the general election campaign 2017) and Beatrix von Storch (Deputy leader of the AfD in the German Bundestag) are two female politicians whose anger expressions could be analyzed in future studies. For a cross-cultural perspective, emotional expressions of other right-wing populist politicians such as Marine Le Pen (party leader of the French Front National) and Geert Wilders (party leader of the PVV) could be analyzed in more depth. To date, only emotional expressions by U.S. President Donald Trump dur-

ing the 2016 election have been analyzed, particularly regarding expressions of contempt (Redlawsk et al. 2016; Redlawsk et al. 2018). Considering growing support for right-wing populist parties, varying forms of negative expressions – such as contempt and varying forms of anger – need to be distinguished to gain further insights into the evaluation of candidates and support for their parties and policies.

Further research might also explore responses to noteworthy anger expressions that are picked up by the media and public, for example because they violate social conventions. These future studies could be conducted as single case studies by observing and analyzing social media responses on Twitter and Facebook or comment sections in newspapers regarding the expressions of anger. Such a non-intrusive approach is not without bias, since only a small portion of the population engages politically online; however, it does not suffer from any observer and experimental effects due to artificial settings. Those case studies provide further real-world context and therefore, could also be used to advance the theoretical underpinnings regarding the role of contextual factors for the evaluation of emotional expressions. The context of emotional expression has often been deemed to be an important factor (Knutson 1996; Hess 2014; Barrett et al. 2011). However, the context is rarely analyzed systematically. Hence, case studies could analyze the context in which anger expressions are deemed appropriate, and whether they lead to changes in the evaluation of the respective politician.

Understanding the emotional appeals of politicians and the subsequent evaluations of political candidates is not only a relevant factor for the assessment of candidate appearances, and the effect of candidates within the triad of electoral vote choices (Campbell et al. 1960); it is also necessary for understanding political discourse, political developments such as populist parties gaining influence, and finally for enhancing the democratic discourse. By expressing anger at the status quo, populist leaders can signal that they understand and care about the socially deprived as well as those voters who feel neglected by the political parties in charge. Consequently, those voters may no longer trust established political parties and abstain from the ballot and other forms of political participation, unless political leaders appeal to them as voters by claiming to represent their interests in an authentic way. A small branch of research has indicated that *listening* can be a strategy applied by political representatives that could potentially improve the democratic discourse within modern societies by making it more inclusive of minorities (Bassel 2017; Dobson 2014). In light of growing populism across Europe in established democracies, democratic pro-

cesses need to be improved. While democratic listening might be one approach for representatives and political candidates, signaling the will to improve people's lives can certainly be used to gain support. Hence, emotion expressions and particularly anger need further attention from an empirical as well as a normative perspective in political science and political psychology. Likewise, the communicative dynamics between populist political leaders and established political leaders regarding their emotion expressions need to be analyzed in their effects on potential voters. Considering controversial topics of recent times – such as the migration crisis and climate change – can evoke varying emotion expressions from politicians across the political spectrum. Therefore, contrasting these varying emotion expressions – especially with a focus on emotional response strategies by political leaders of established parties – could further improve the understanding of candidate evaluations and citizens' support for political parties.

Finally, this study has shown that the currently predominant measurement of emotions as discrete emotions might be easily implemented by using fictitious scenarios of putative politicians; it is however much harder to implement discrete emotion expressions using real-world examples. Due to rapid changes in emotion expressions, the co-occurrence of several discrete emotions in video clips can hardly be avoided. These emotion expressions are likely to be similar or at least compatible in valence, arousal and coping potential. Therefore, this study urges the field of political psychology to reconsider the conceptual approach for the analysis of emotion expressions. Approaches that group emotion expressions along dimensions should not just consider two dimensions – valence and arousal – they should consider three dimensions: valence, arousal, and coping potential or dominance. These three dimensions are also connected to the three-factor model – happiness/reassurance, anger/threat, and fear/evasion. Focusing on the three factors and their underlying dimensions could be one way to guide future empirical work concerning politicians' emotion expressions.

The interplay of discrete emotion expressions – especially of anger, hate, contempt and disgust – should be of particular interest in future studies. It has been pointed out that some emotions overlap while they remain unique with regard to their specific appraisals, underlying targets, and aims (Fischer et al. 2018: 317). By considering the overlap and interplay of discrete emotion expressions, a deeper theoretical understanding of emotions in politics might be gained, especially with regard to the emotional appeals of right-wing populists. Different discrete emotions might be expressed according to varying channels, i.e., verbally, visually, or aurally.

Likewise, they could occur within the same channel simultaneously or sequentially (see also Fischer et al. 2018: 317). Hence, focusing on underlying commonalities, the co-occurrence, and specific use of anger, hate, and even fear should receive more attention in future research.

One strand of research has recently tried to expand the measurement of discrete emotions by connecting those to other discrete emotions, particularly anger, fear, and hope (or hopelessness), and wider-related concepts such as resentment and ressentiment in order to explain support for right-wing parties, nativist movements, and protectionist votes such as the Brexit referendum (Capelos & Demertzis 2018; Salmela & von Scheve 2018). Connecting anger expressions to these broader concepts could be a fruitful endeavor of future research. By doing so, new light might be shed on emotion expressions and polarizing political rhetoric geared towards both supporters and non-supporters.