

WORKSHOP: Emotions and Politics

10 - 11 March 2025

Uni Mail & Campus Biotech

Organized by the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences & the Department of Political Science and International Relations, UNIGE

Compulsory registration: <https://formulaire.unige.ch/cisa/survey/index.php/174328?lang=en>

Deadline: Friday February 28th

PROGRAM

Session 1: Monday 10th March

Uni Mail, MR070 (before lunch) & MR170 (after lunch)

12:15 – 13:30 Gijs SCHUMACHER

“Politics and emotions investigated comparatively: The season finale”

In my talk I will address a popular narrative about the role of emotions in politics. Arguably, politics is becoming more negative. Politicians’ rhetoric is full of negative emotions and voters are rallied by these negative emotions. Yet, these assumptions are mostly untested. Summarizing a 5-year long research project, I will discuss different research paper that cast a different light on this popular narrative. Combining diverse methods such as automated text analysis, conjoint experiments, writing tasks and facial electromyography, the project’s results overall show the power of positive emotions. At the same time, the project’s results also indicate that we should rethink many of the assumptions that underlie work on emotions in politics.

13:30 – 14:30 Lunch break

14:30 – 15:15 Simon HUG

“Emotions in international assemblies”

Debates in international assemblies can at times become heated and emotional. Few studies so far have, however, assessed (discrete) emotions detectable in words, in pitch and facial expression during speeches. Drawing on a newly developed tool that primarily produces diarized transcripts based on video-recordings (but also allows for multiple different information extractions) we analyze a small set of debates at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on two topical themes, namely the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories (agenda item 7 of the UNHRC) and the human

rights situation linked to the Russo-Ukrainian war. Our initial findings highlight the suitability of our approach and the tools we deploy, highlight also, however, some issues that studies of emotions in political debates have largely neglected, so far.

-
- 15:15 – 16:00 Sandra PENIC
“Beyond personal emotions: The role of emotion norms in shaping policy support in conflict-affected societies”
 Social norms play a crucial role in shaping conflict dynamics. While most research has focused on how people perceive others’ beliefs and behaviors, the role of emotion norms in conflict transformation remains understudied. Yet, given the well-established impact of emotions toward opposing groups on conflict-related attitudes and behaviors, emotion norms may be equally significant. In this talk, I present preliminary findings from the *Emotion Norms Project*, which investigates the relationship between emotion norms, personal emotions, and support for conflict-related policies. We explore whether emotion norms influence policy attitudes beyond personal emotions and other social norms. Additionally, we examine how emotion norms evolve over time and how they are affected by conflict-related events. Overall, this research highlights the critical role of emotion norms in shaping conflict attitudes and calls for expanding research beyond the predominant focus on personally experienced emotions in conflict resolution.
-

Session 2: Tuesday 11th March
 Campus Biotech, B1.06

-
- 09:00 – 09:15 Welcome
-
- 09:15 – 10:00 Nathalie GIGER & Maxime WALDER
“Selective information seeking in electoral campaigns”
 Political information is fundamental to ensure high-quality decision-making in elections. While political information is abundantly available nowadays, navigating the complex political information environment requires selecting relevant news content. Voters’ predisposition drives this information-seeking behavior and reinforces prior beliefs by exposing voters to political information and narratives congruent with their ideological predisposition. Our presentation discusses the selective information-seeking mechanism and its impact on voters’ decision-making process. We present the results from survey experiments, field experiments, and observational designs that estimate how the socio-political predisposition of voters drives selective information seeking during election campaigns and how it impacts their decision-making process in elections.
-
- 10:00 – 10:45 Adrien PETIPAS & Andrea BARBIERI
“Opinion stability and change in direct democratic campaigns”
 This presentation investigates how voters process information and shape their opinions in direct democratic campaigns. It examines whether and how citizens
-

adjust their voting behavior in response to two key factors: political party cues and substantive policy information. Special attention is given to cases where campaign information conflicts with voters' prior beliefs, creating a tension between external messages and internal predispositions. These dynamics are analyzed using panel data, rolling cross-section surveys, and survey experiments.

10:45 – 11:15

Coffee break

11:15 – 12:30

Noga ARIKHA

“A plea for ambivalence: The feeling self, discomfort, and the political”

In this closing talk, I'll strive to offer a wrap-up of the preceding contributions through the lens of the embodied cognition framework, and by looking at the political sphere as one in which comfort zones are delimited and discomfort is played out. I will focus on the continuum from individual psyche to collective feelings, from feeling self to political psyche, from evolved peripersonal space to social co-regulation, from the infant's embodied development to the body politic - all this via the psychodynamic importance of ambivalence in psychological maturation.
