

# Emotions, Ideology and Collective Political Action\*

## Emociones, ideología y acción política colectiva

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### ABSTRACT

Having overcome the prejudice that equated emotion with irrationality, collective action theories are beginning to incorporate emotional variables. Nonetheless, these are restricted to negative ones, fundamentally anger. This is due to the fact that collective action is associated exclusively with protest, when this does not necessarily have to be the case. The aims of the present work are twofold: a) to analyse the structure of emotions with regard to the Spanish Government's decision to negotiate with ETA; and b) to verify the impact of these emotions and of ideology on the intention to participate in demonstrations supporting or protesting against said decision. The results show that emotions can be organised into three factors: anger, enthusiasm and anxiety. Anger and enthusiasm account for a high percentage of variance in the intention to demonstrate. Ideology, although to a lesser extent, also has a significant influence.

#### Key words authors

Collective Action, Emotions, ETA, Ideology.

#### Key words plus

Ideologies, Psychological Aspects, Consumer Participation, Psychological Aspects.

### RESUMEN

Después de superado el prejuicio que equiparaba emoción con irracionalidad, las teorías de la acción colectiva empiezan a incorporar las variables emocionales. Sin embargo, las emociones a las que aluden se limitan a las negativas y, fundamentalmente, a la ira. Esto obedece a que la acción colectiva se asocia exclusivamente con la protesta. Pero las acciones colectivas también pueden ser proactivas. Por este motivo, en esta investigación nos propusimos un doble objetivo: a) analizar la organización de diferentes emociones en relación a la decisión del Gobierno de España de negociar con ETA y b) conocer la incidencia de esas emociones y de la ideología, en la intención de participar en acciones de apoyo o protesta a dicha decisión. Los resultados muestran que las emociones se organizan en tres factores: ira, entusiasmo y ansiedad. La ira y el entusiasmo explican un porcentaje muy elevado de la varianza de la intención de movilizarse. La ideología, aunque en menor medida, también muestra un peso significativo.

#### Palabras clave autores

Acción colectiva, emociones, ETA, ideología.

#### Palabras clave descriptores

ETA (Organización), ideologías políticas, aspectos psicológicos, participación comunitaria.

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The motives which lead citizens to become involved in collective political actions have long interested social scientists. Le Bon's study (1986) on the masses significantly influenced the manner of approaching this topic. In this work, the French author alluded to irritability, the exaggeration of sentiments and the inability to reason as elements that are responsible for collective behaviour. Until approximately the end of the 1960s, studies on collective behaviour proposed frustration, anger or alienation as the only explanatory variables for this type of behaviour.

To a great extent, these approaches adopted the prejudice originating in the Greek period, which considered that emotion interferes with rationality (Izard, 1972; Marcus, Neuman & Mackuen, 2000). Thus, and given that collective behaviour would be determined by these emotions and passions, it could only be concluded that this was a case of maladjusted behaviour (Goodwin, Jasper & Poletta, 2000). For this reason, those authors who defended the rationality of this behaviour proposed models which avoided emotional variables, a clear example of this being the resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Oberschall, 1973). Along with these formulations, in recent years other factors with more cultural significance have been incorporated, such as that of identity (Melucci, 1996; Simon, 2004).

These new theories are interesting enough; nonetheless, it cannot continue to be ignored that emotions pervade all settings of social life, including collective actions. In line with the reasoning of Lazarus (1984), emotions are reactions to cognitive evaluations of an individual's environment. Thus, we need to analyse what impact these emotions have on the responses given by subjects when faced with different specific contexts. In the case of the relationship between emotions and collective behaviour, this analysis takes on even greater relevance, due fundamentally to three reasons. Firstly, because this is a topic that has long been ignored. Secondly, as the theory that equated emotion and irrationality is no longer supported (Marcus et al., 2000). Jasper (1998) focused this debate particularly well, pointing out that emotions, in

the same way as beliefs, can be adapted or not to a given situation, but it is a serious error to consider them generically as irrational (p. 398). Thirdly, as emotions are clearly linked with action tendencies (Briñol, Gandarillas, Horcajo & Becerra, 2010; Frijda, 1988; Taylor, 1995)

If the interest in studying the relationship between emotions and collective behaviour is assumed, the next step is to verify which emotions may be relevant for this objective, and how they are related to collective behaviour.

The study by Goodwin et al. (2000) provides an extensive list of those emotions which, at different moments in time, have been associated to different types of collective actions and social movements: anger, pride, blame, loyalty, etc. But among them, there are some which appear to be systematically linked to collective behaviour. Anger is one of the most significant, and is among those which have elicited most interest from researchers in this area. The importance attached to this emotion is clearly highlighted in that for Gamson (1992) it is anger "... that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul" (p. 33). Zomerén, Spears, Fischer and Leach (2004) recently proposed a dual action tendency model, comprising instrumentality and anger, and the results of their work show that anger, resulting from the perception of injustice for the endogroup, has a direct bearing on participation in protest actions.

From the perspective of violent political conflict, Bar-Tal, Halperin and De Rivera (2007) identified three emotions which contribute to the generation and maintenance of inter-group confrontation: anger, fear and hate. For the analysis of collective action, the first two emotions are of interest, since hate is more associated with irresolvable conflicts which entail the dehumanisation of the adversary (Borja-Orozco, Barreto, Sabucedo & López-López, 2008; Staub, 2005). In relation to anger, we have already pointed out that it has long been recognised as a facilitating variable in political protest. With regard to fear, and even though it may be a necessary state in the path towards hate (Halperin, 2008), under other circumstances it can also lead to inhibition when associated with anxiety (Lau & Heldman, 2009).

As can be observed, the two emotions that are referred to in order to explain collective action, anger and fear, are both negative. This responds to the fact that the majority of these behaviours are expressions of rejection to determined governmental policies. But this being so, it is also true that at certain moments, and in certain contexts, there may indeed be collective actions supporting decisions taken by the powers that be, and which are vehemently protested by the opposing political sectors. Thus, in situations which are highly polarised, we may find that demonstrations respond to both the rejection and support of determined policies. In the latter case, the emotion that leads to collective action cannot be negative; rather it must be positive, given that it arises from a favourable evaluation of the government's action.

In line with the above, the emotional intelligence theory by Marcus et al. (2000) may be useful for a more global consideration of the role of emotions in collective action. From this theory, we are interested in the association it establishes between different types of political settings and different emotions. These emotions, in turn, would explain various political behaviours. More specifically, said theory identifies three possible socio-political settings which people may face. Two of these are familiar, in the sense that they are encountered in the presence of well known ideas and situations and, thus, they know how to act. One would be formed by all those stimuli and decisions that individuals find positive; while the other would include actions which are perceived as negative. Finally, the third environment would include all that which is new. Thus, in this final case there are no routines or habits available to confront these unknown situations and, consequently, there would be more doubts and uncertainty regarding how to act. These settings would be associated to three emotional factors: enthusiasm, anger and anxiety, respectively.

These emotions are especially present in political life when events of great impact for the interests or values of the citizens occur. One example of this is the decision to embark on a peace process with

a terrorist group. Considering the characteristics of the terrorist groups (Rodríguez-Carballeira, Martín-Peña, Almendros, Escartín, Porrúa & Bertacco, 2009), such a measure may give rise to great social polarisation, due to the hopes that one part of the population may place in this process, due to the frustration of those who may perceive it as a betrayal by the government, and due to the uncertainty of those who find themselves in a setting that they had never imagined and which appears to be full of unknown factors (Sacipa, 2005; Sabucedo & Alzate, 2005).

Given that, as mentioned above, these emotions are the response to the evaluation of certain political measures and decisions, there must clearly be a relationship between them and the political orientation of individuals. In the case of embarking on a peace process with a terrorist group, the stronger or weaker identification with the ideology held by the Government for this measure must be an element which contributes to demonstrating in favour of or against this decision. At the same time, it could be envisaged that the more interest one has in the matter, the firmer one's position will be, in one sense or the other.

The present work analyses these matters with regard to the Spanish Government's decision to negotiate with ETA. On 26 March 2006, ETA announced a permanent ceasefire, and a few days later the Spanish Government expressed its desire to open negotiations with the terrorist group and embark on what it referred to as a peace process, which gave rise to considerable social debate and confrontation.

With regard to said situation, the objectives are twofold:

1. Verifying the structure of emotions with regard to the decision by the Spanish Government to negotiate with ETA.
2. Verifying the importance of the different emotions and ideological variables in the intention to participate in demonstrations in favour of or against said decision.

## Method

### Sample

The sample comprised 263 Psychology students from the University of Santiago Compostela and the Autonomous University of Madrid. Ages ranged from 20 to 42, with an average age of 22.2. Of the 263 students, 224 were women and 37 men - proportions which reflect fairly accurately the distribution of students by gender for this degree in Spain.

### Material and procedure

An *ad hoc* questionnaire was prepared which included, among others, the following questions:

#### Emotions

Individuals were asked about the emotions they felt faced with the Government's decision to negotiate with ETA. The emotions were those used in the study by Marcus et al. (2000): enthusiastic, bitter, abandoned, offended, afraid, worried, proud, anxious, disgusted, angry and optimistic. Each emotion had four response alternatives, ranging from *nothing* to *a lot*.

#### Interest in the problem of terrorism

This dimension was measured with three questions: How often did they speak about terrorism and ETA, the degree with which they monitored news on these topics, and the importance thereof with regard to other social and political matters. For each question there were four response categories, which ranged from nothing to a lot. The three responses were then merged to form one single political interest index.

#### Ideological self-positioning

The subjects were asked to self-position themselves on a scale which ranged from totally right wing to totally left wing.

### Intention of participating in collective actions

For each of the cases, support for or protesting against the Government's decision, they were presented with a four-step scale which range from *definitely would not participate* to *definitely would participate*.

The questionnaire was applied collectively over the last two weeks of the month of May 2006.

## Results

Firstly, we shall refer to the structure of the emotions, in order then go on to analyse the impact thereof and of the ideological identification and political interest in the intention to participate.

### Organisation of emotions

An exploratory factor analysis with Varimax orthogonal rotation (SPSS) was conducted. The analysis revealed the existence of three factors which explained 69.03% of the variance. The weighting of each emotion in each of the three factors is presented in Table 1.

In the first factor, we find emotions which clearly condemn the Government's decision to embark on a peace process with ETA: bitter, disgusted, angry, offended, and abandoned. These five emotions formed part of the anger factor proposed by Marcus, due to which this denomination was maintained.

The second factor also has a clear interpretation: all the emotions that comprise it reflect positive emotions with regard to the Government's decision. Thus, this factor is called enthusiasm.

Finally, the third factor is also well-defined. It comprises the emotions of worry, fear, and anxiety. In order to maintain the terminology that has already been coined in this type of study, we opted to call it anxiety, understanding that it alludes to the concern and fear arising from the Government's decision to negotiate with ETA.

**TABLE 1**  
Factor loading of emotions in each one of the factors

	Factor I		Factor II		Factor III
Bitter	0.82	Enthusiastic	0.80	Worried	0.86
Disgusted	0.79	Optimistic	0.79	Afraid	0.82
Angry	0.77	Proud	0.79	Anxious	0.57
Offended	0.75				
Abandoned	0.72				

Source: Own Work.

### *Impact on the intention to participate*

With the aim of verifying the impact of the variables considered in the present study on the intention to participate in acts of support or protest, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. The predictors variables were the three emotional factors, interest in the problem of terrorism and ideological self-positioning. The variables which proved to be significant regarding the intention to participate in acts of support are shown in Table 2.

As can be observed, the variable that has the greatest impact on the intention to participation in actions supporting negotiations is enthusiasm. This highlights the fact that there is potentially

a type of collective action, of a proactive nature, which is linked to positive emotions.

In addition to enthusiasm, ideological self-positioning also has a significant influence in the equation. Considering the polarity of this variable, individuals with a political standpoint more to the left show a greater tendency to demonstrate in favour of the Government's decision. This result is coherent with the fact that it was the Socialist Party, in power at that time in Spain, which defended said negotiations as opposed to the stance of the principal, conservative opposition party. Interest in the problem of terrorism also contributed to the intention of participating in demonstrations supporting the Government's position.

**TABLE 2**  
Regression analysis on the intention to participate in acts of support

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Enthusiasm	0.556***	0.468***	0.441***
Political orientation		0.257***	0.253***
Political interest			0.172**
<i>F</i>	68.80***	14.04***	7.27***
<i>df</i>	(1:154)	(1:153)	(1:152)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.304	0.359	0.384

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Own Work.

The results on the intention to participate in acts of protest against the Government’s decision are presented in Table 3.

In the case of the intention to participation in demonstrations protesting against the negotiations, we see that anger is the determining emotion. The hierarchical regression analysis also reveals that there are two other statistically significant variables, namely political orientation and enthusiasm, both with negative polarity. The input of these variables does not modify the relevance of anger, and gives rise to a slight increase in the percentage of explained variance for the equation.

### Conclusions

One of the objectives of the present study is to verify the factor structure for emotions in relation to the political setting. Our results show that, in light of a governmental decision to negotiate with a terrorist group, the emotions can be grouped into three factors, two of which are negative and one positive: anger, anxiety and enthusiasm. In this sense, we can affirm that they express basically the same emotions as those obtained by Marcus (1988) in other settings of political behaviour.

But undoubtedly, the most significant finding of the present study was to verify the impact of said emotions and ideology on the intention of parti-

cipating in demonstrations in favour of or against the Government’s decision. Here there are various aspects of interest. Firstly, it was shown that collective action need not always be linked to negative emotions. Consequently, it is essential to analyse the context of the political debate prevailing at each moment in order to verify what type of emotions may lead to demonstrations. Thus, during periods of great political polarisation, not only will there be individuals who demonstrate against the Government and its decisions, but there will also be sections among the citizens that do so in support of the Government, especially if they believe that pressure from other groups may block policies with which they agree. In such cases, the enthusiasm derived from supporting the government’s measures will be transformed into motivation to participate.

Secondly, the role of negative emotions was the one foreseen. Anger, as has been borne out repeatedly, is a fundamental emotion for the collective action of protesting. In fact, on its own, it accounts for 37% of the variance in the intention to participate. With regard to anxiety, this variable does not appear in either of the two regression equations. MacKuen, Wolak, Keele and Marcus (in press) had postulated that anxiety, unlike the other two emotions, led to more a more reflexive and less militant behaviour. For this reason, the doubts generated on the benefits and drawbacks

**TABLE 3**  
Regression analysis on the intention to participate in acts of protest

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Anger	0.611***	0.521***	0.460***
Political orientation		-0.234***	-0.198***
Enthusiasm			-0.183***
F	145.01***	18.51***	11.71**
Df	(1:244)	(1:243)	(1:242)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.370	0.415	0.439

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Own Work.

of the decision adopted by the Government are transformed into an important barrier for participation, either in one sense or another.

Thirdly, it must be stressed that it is the emotional variables which contribute to the greatest extent to the percentage of explained variance. This would seem to bear out the theory of those authors who postulate the existence of a direct path for emotional impact on collective action (Stürmer & Simon, 2004; Zomerén et al., 2004), and that of those who point to them as a decisive element for action (Taylor, 1995). But also worthy of note is the role of ideological variables which, although not so important as that of emotions, is significant all the same (Arias & Barreto, 2009). In this sense, one datum that merits special mention is that interest in the topic of terrorism has a positive impact on the intention to participate in support demonstrations of support but not in protest ones. This is a relevant datum and would seem to indicate that, in addition to the specific matter of the call to action, there is also an additional motivation for attending protest demonstrations. Klandermans (2010) considers hostility towards the government as a further reason for participating in specific protest actions. Taking into account the climate of polarisation and political confrontation existing in Spain at the moment in which the mobilisation under study took place, this explanation would seem to be reasonable.

In addition to the above, it should also be pointed out that a high percentage of explained variance in the intention to participate in both types of demonstration may be due to the fact that it was the intention to mobilise which was measured and not the actual attendance of a demonstration. But having said that, it must also be mentioned that this would affect the percentage of explained variance, but not the meaning and relevance of each one of the variables analysed.

In short, the results presented herein highlight the importance of emotions in the analysis and comprehension of collective behaviour. This, however, clearly does not mean that we should disregard the existence of other factors, such as instrumentality or identity, which also help to explain

this type of behaviour (Sabucedo, Durán & Alzate, 2010). Before this, however, once the relevance of emotions has been demonstrated, the data in this work must serve to analyse the type of interactions that come about between this group of variables and different political contexts (Sabucedo, Vilas, van Stekelenburg, Klandermans & Alzate, 2009).

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