

Envy, anger and political mobilization in South Africa

Land policy is an emotionally-charged issue in sub-Saharan Africa due to the combination of its socioeconomic and political significance with the legacy of historical inequities in its distribution. As an income source and store of economic value, land is an essential resource in for attaining material security amid high levels of socioeconomic uncertainty, while also acting as an important source of *social* value (Berry 2002).¹ Despite (or perhaps because of) these factors, most countries have failed to address colonial-era legacies of physical displacement, redrawn physical and social boundaries, and transformed rules governing land access, transfer and usage. Instead, land rights are a highly valuable political tool and are used to cement relationships between patrons (political elites), brokers (chiefs) and clients (voters), especially in the absence of formal property rights in rural areas (Boone 2009; Baldwin 2014). The politicization of this resource has led to the intensification of land-related (physical) conflict in rural areas (Boone 2014).

South Africa's long history of racialized politics led to marked inequality in land distribution and over two decades of land reform policies have largely failed to produce meaningful change since its democratic transition in 1994. White-owned farms comprised approximately 70% of the country's land surface in the early 1990s and redistribution efforts have only led to a transfer of 7.5% of formerly white-owned land in both urban and rural localities (PLAAS 2013).² The ruling African National Congress (ANC) has consistently ran on the electoral platform of land reform (ANC 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014), but until recently restricted its policies to redressing apartheid-era forced removals via 'willing-buyer-willing-seller' programs in which current owners are paid full market value for their property. In February 2018, however, the South African National Assembly passed a motion mandating the Joint Constitutional Review Committee with considering potential mechanisms for implementing land expropriation without compensation (National Assembly of South Africa 2018). What explains the timing of this policy reversal, given the longstanding inclusion of land reform in the

¹ With the relevant permission, I am hoping to work on this research question for the final projects of both this course and American Political Behavior I (literature review only), therefore this introductory section includes material previously used for a project description.

² The country's first census of the full population was held in 1996 and indicated the following population distribution: 76.7% black, 8.9% Coloured, 2.6% South Asian, 10.9% white, and 0.9% other or unspecified (Statistics South Africa 1998, 9).

political debate? Why is the ANC willing to risk the potential domestic and international instability associated with this change?

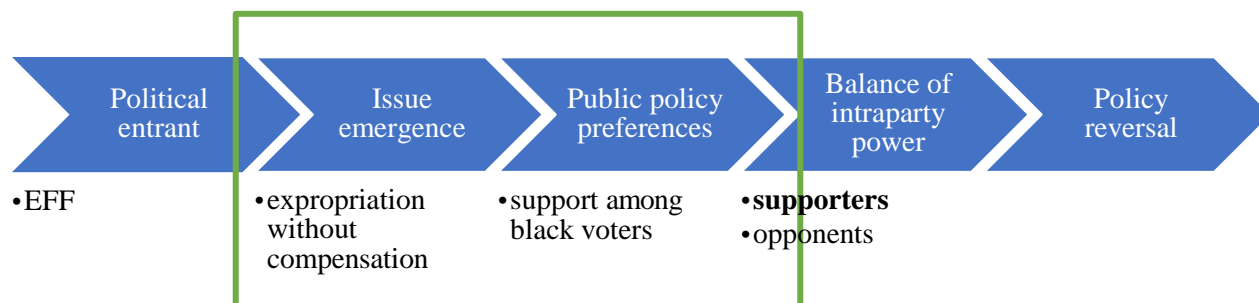
Literature on issue emergence in the United States suggests that conflict over novel policy proposals occurs predictably with the electoral cycle as a strategy for increasing the prospects of likely losing candidates (Stimson 2004; see Appendix Figure 1 for the argument in brief). However, South Africa is a one-party dominant democracy and empirical evidence indicates that electoral accountability is generally weak in the region due to the primacy of ethnic preference in creating and sustaining electoral support—even in countries with competitive elections (e.g. Adida et al. 2017; Horowitz and Long 2016). Furthermore, the country directly experienced the consequences of Zimbabwe’s failed “Fast-Track Land Reform Program” (FTLRP) via a large influx of both political asylum-seekers and economic migrants. In my final paper, I will show that the combination of national and internal instability caused by an economic downturn and a party leadership struggle, respectively, created an unprecedented level of vulnerability for the ANC in the run up to the May 2019 elections. This presented an opportunity for political entrepreneurs to mobilize support for issues previously seen as too high risk for concerted action by the governing party.

Emotions and political mobilization

Land expropriation without compensation is a policy initiative of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a political party founded in 2013 that experienced unexpected levels of success in attracting electoral support among black voters in the 2014 national (won 6.35% of the total vote) and 2016 local elections (8.31%) (Electoral Commission of South Africa 2018). How was the EFF able to gain sufficient ANC support for its parliamentary motion potentially transform the country’s land reform policy? While the action does not necessarily equate to a full endorsement of such a high risk strategy, it is a major concession to the EFF’s policy agenda over the objection of the leading opposition party (Democratic Alliance) and business interests. Rather than focusing on elites and intraparty cleavages on this issue, however, this paper explores the role of public opinion in tipping the balance in favor of ANC supporters of this policy (see Figure 1, below). I argue that emotions played a significant role in individual citizens’ decision-making process, providing the mechanism by which the EFF was able to successfully mobilize public support for change. The EFF’s political messaging successfully cued latent feelings of injustice regarding the continued inequality in land distribution among the

South African electorate, which triggered public anger at both white landowners and the ANC for failing to redress these disparities.

Figure 1: Argument in brief



Emotions are a type of affect that can be understood as a type of mental state or a process by which stimuli are turned into bodily responses (“Theories of Emotion” n.d.). Psychological research indicates the existence of six universal emotions: happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. Moreover, evidence suggests that emotions are linked to specific adaptive behaviors (e.g. fear to protection and anger to destruction), which is reflected in some definitions of the concept. Lerner et al. (2015), for example, define emotions as “multifaceted, biologically mediated, concomitant reactions (experiential, cognitive, behavioral, expressive) regarding survival-relevant events” (800). Research from psychology and behavioral economics shows that emotions play an important role in decision-making, although there is significant debate on the causal ordering of cognition and emotions in this process. *Non-cognitive theories* contend that emotion responses (i.e. physiological arousal and physical expression) directly follow external stimuli, while *somatic feedback theories* argue that these physiological responses are in fact necessary for an individual to even recognize that they are experiencing an emotion. This paper draws its analysis from *cognitive theories*, which posit (in contrast) that cognition precedes affect as an individual’s evaluation of a stimulus informs her (potentially unique) emotional response. Elster (1998), for example, states that cognitive antecedents and intentional objects distinguish emotions from other forms of affect or “visceral factors.”

Cognitive appraisal theories in particular emphasize an individual’s evaluation of a stimulus on five dimensions: motivational state, situational state, probability, power, and agency (“Theories of Emotion” n.d. citing Roseman 1984). Appraisal consequently leads not only to an

emotional response, but to subsequent actions (Appendix Figure 2). Emotions therefore affect *individual decision-making* by influencing her evaluation of a situation (i.e. ‘content of thought’), shaping the extent of this informational processing (‘depth of thought’) or by impacting her aims or motivations (‘goal activation’) (Lerner et al. 2015). Lastly, emotions also play an important role in *interpersonal decision-making* by helping individuals to navigate social decisions via: an understanding of another actor’s emotions, beliefs and intentions; incentives or sanctions for desired or undesired behavior; and the evocation of complementary, shared or shared emotions in others. Despite these crucial social functions, Lerner et al. (2015) find relatively little research on emotions and group-level decisions. As I am focusing on the role of emotions on public opinion, however, the existing research should be sufficient to make the required connection between elite cues and individual voters’ policy preferences.

The literature clearly indicates that emotions can play an important role in individual-level political behavior by influencing an actor’s appraisal of a politically-relevant intentional object, the degree to which she focuses on this object, whether or not it is likely to affect her political goals, and by affecting how she engages in social decisions that require cooperation (e.g. participation in collective action, legislative vote). However, as the adaptive functions of emotions vary widely, not all are useful for political mobilization. The subsequent sections will therefore contrast envy (typically non-mobilizing) and anger (mobilizing), in order to illustrate the types of elite cues that are likely to have shifted public opinion in support of the EFF’s policy initiative.

Envy, anger and cognitive appraisals

As explained above, I will assume that emotions are preceded by cognitive antecedents and psychological research indicates that emotions can influence political behavior by shaping both further beliefs (i.e. cognitions) and subsequent actions (Frijda and Mesquita 2000). The Appraisal Tendency Framework (ATF) attempts to explain this transformation of emotions into further cognitions (‘appraisal tendency’) and subsequent behavioral dispositions (‘action tendency’) based on the characteristics individual to each emotion (‘appraisal dimensions’) (Keltner and Lerner 2010). It therefore focuses on the consequences of emotions rather than on how they are activated, providing an important conceptual model with which to distinguish between the unique effects of emotions with the same valence, such as anger and envy (Lerner

and Keltner 2001). As Table 1 shows, the two emotions can also share cognitive antecedents and intentional objects but are associated with differing action tendencies.

Table 1: Elements of anger and envy

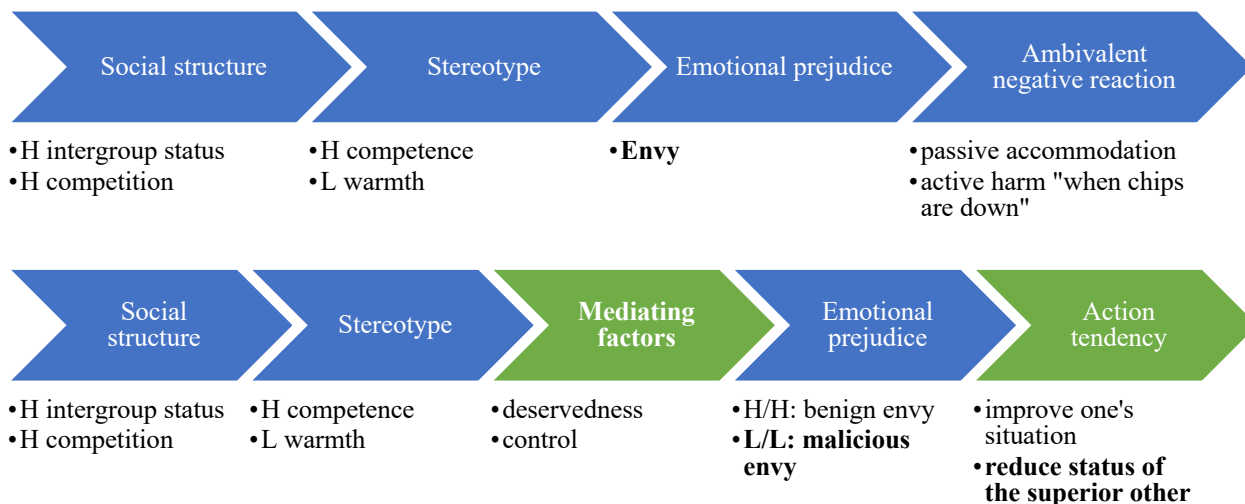
Element	Description	Anger	Envy
<i>Cognitive antecedents</i>	Beliefs triggering an emotion; Elster (1998) argues that this distinguishes emotions from other visceral factors.	Can be shared (e.g. injustice of continued disparities in land ownership).	
<i>Intentional objects</i>	Emotion must be about something (e.g. person or state of affairs); distinguishes emotions from other visceral factors.	Can be shared (e.g. white South Africans).	
<i>Physiological arousal</i>	Hormonal and automatic nervous system responses.	Less relevant to politics.	
<i>Physical expression</i>	Face, body; may be universal or culturally-specific.	Less relevant to politics.	
<i>Valence</i>	Location on pleasure/pain scale.	Shared – negative.	
<i>Action tendency</i>	“states of readiness to execute a given kind of action... Action tendencies have the character of urges or impulses” (Frijda 1986, 70, 78 cited in Elster 1998, 51). NB: spontaneous action tendencies can be regulated via social norms and self-regulation.	Differ (see ATF)	

Source: Elster (1998)

Envy

The psychological research on envy suggests the emotion has a clear link to political behavior due to its inherently interpersonal nature. Envy is, by definition, linked to *social comparison* and particularly to the affective response of feeling that a social other (whether individual or group) is superior to oneself (Fiske 2010; Keltner and Lerner 2010; McClendon 2018; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009, 2012). The literature on envy consequently studies the relationship between social perceptions and decision-making. The Stereotype Content Model (SCM), for example, posits that social structure (perceptions of intergroup status and competition) leads to specific stereotypes about groups based on their perceived competence and warmth, which elicits a specific emotional prejudice that can lead to positive or negative reactions to members of that outgroup (Fiske 2010). In this model, envy is triggered when groups are perceived as having a high social status amid a competitive environment, thus leading to the perception of their members as being of high competence but low warmth. The SCM consequently predicts that other members of society will have an ambivalent reaction to individuals in this outgroup, generally choosing passive accommodation unless in situations of crisis in which they will engage in active harm (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2: Original and Adapted Stereotype Content Models



Sources: Fiske (2010); van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2012).

While the SCM is useful for exploring the causes of this emotion, it does not explicitly take into account the existence of two forms of envy: benign envy (“I wish I had what you have”) and malicious envy (“And I wish you did not have it”) (Fiske 2010, 2). Research shows that the variants of envy not only have distinct aims (improving one’s situation vs. pulling down the envied object, respectively) (see van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2012), but are also characterized by varying appraisal dimensions: high vs. low perceived control (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009) and high vs. low perceived deservedness of the other’s superior status (So et al. 2015). This suggests that the SCM can be adapted to accommodate this distinction by including these mediating factors, thus leading to differing action tendencies.

Envy is thus likely to emerge in conditions of high intergroup competition (presumably over resources) with a clear status ordering of these social groups, but its political consequences are mediated by public perceptions of the privileged outgroup and by individuals’ sense of agency. These antecedent conditions are applicable to South Africa despite the removal of a formal racial hierarchy after 1990: the introduction of full economic and political rights for all has led to increased competition between citizens of all races, while persistent socioeconomic inequality continues to place white South Africans in a privileged position. As a result, this group is likely perceived as high status and low warmth by most of their fellow citizens—along with privileged members of other racial groups (McClendon 2018). If my argument is correct,

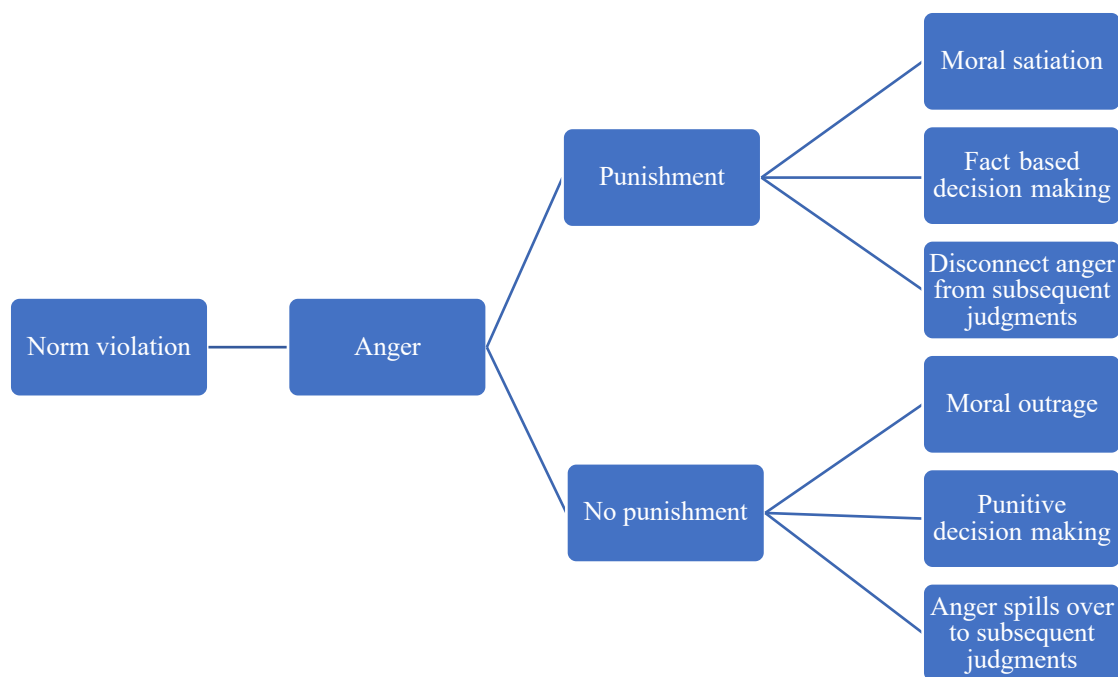
public support for land expropriation without compensation in particular has emerged due to the perception of limited individual agency among citizens of other races, in addition to the belief that white South Africans do not deserve their higher status position. This suggests that public preferences were driven by the emotional prejudice of malicious envy and that the expropriation policy represents the action tendency of reducing the status of the superior other.

Envy and anger

Fiske (2010) states that envy generally leads to humiliation (shame at own inadequacy) and anger (injustice at low-status positions). Shame is associated with the action tendency of hiding and avoiding scrutiny, which is unlikely to mobilize an individual to political action. Anger, in contrast, is highly mobilizing due to its adaptive purpose of destroying barriers to the satisfaction of basic human needs (Plutchik 1984, cited in “Theories of Emotion” n.d.) and its association with the action tendency of restoring justice and holding other individuals responsible (Keltner and Lerner 2010). There is consequently a substantial amount of research on anger and decision-making, addressing: the social-functional role of anger (Hutcherson and Gross 2011); cross-national variation in its causes and expression (Kassinove et al. 1997); its effect on memory (Newhagen 1998), risk perceptions (Lerner and Keltner 2001; Lerner et al. 2003) and social judgments (Keltner, Ellsworth, and Edwards 1993; Lerner and Tiedens 2006); and its relationship to other emotions (Fischer and Roseman 2007; Petersen and Zukerman 2010). Action tendencies are moderated by social norms and emotional self-regulation (Lerner et al. 2015), and there are a range of methods by which an individual can mitigate anger’s effect on her decision-making (Rusting and Nolen-Hoeksema 1998). However, anger precipitated by norm violations is likely to lead to moral outrage and punitiveness if individuals are made aware that a norm violator has gone unpunished (Goldberg, Lerner, and Tetlock 1999, Figure 3, below).

This suggests that anger is particularly effective at mobilizing support if elites can draw attention to (objective or imagined) injustice. The persistence of race-based socioeconomic inequality is a major violation of South Africa’s new democratic norms and elite cues that white citizens are norm violators who continue to benefit from the legacies of apartheid-era policies should therefore lead to moral outrage and a more punitive assessment of the context of land reform, with likely spillover effects into other issue areas.

Figure 3: Norm violations and decision-making



Source: adapted from Goldberg, Lerner, and Tetlock (1999).

The psychological research on anger and envy suggests that while malicious envy leads to the action tendency of reducing the status of another, it is more useful for political elites to cue anger over envy if aiming to mobilize support for a high-risk policy such as expropriation without compensation. Anger is associated with high levels of certainty and perceived individual control over a situation, and the opinion that others are to blame for unfavorable conditions—leading to higher levels of optimism when facing risk that facilitate mobilization (Lerner and Keltner 2001). In contrast, envy has ambiguous consequences for mobilization as even if malicious envy precipitates the goal of reducing an outgroup’s status, a sense of low individual agency may create obstacles to collective action (see Table 2, below). Furthermore, evidence suggests that envy and status motivations in general tend to be stronger if the objects are seen as relatively similar to an individual, whether due to a membership in an ingroup (e.g. co-workers, age cohort, co-ethnics) or to geographic proximity, as both conditions provide greater information and visibility (McClendon 2018). Race remains the leading social cleavage in South Africa and most localities remain segregated due to the legacies of apartheid-era spatial planning. One might therefore find that levels of envy may have been relatively low prior to the EFF’s

cues, which would have provided the relevant visibility to both induce this emotion and subsequent anger at the ANC's failure to redress the injustice of this status ordering.

Table 2: Envy and anger in the appraisal tendency framework

Element	Definition	Envy³	Anger
<i>Appraisal dimensions⁴</i>			
Certainty	High (low) if future events seem predictable (unpredictable) and comprehensible (incomprehensible).	Low?	High
Pleasantness ⁵	High (low) to the extent that one feels pleasure (displeasure).	Low	Low
Attentional activity	High (low) if something draws (repels) one's attention.	Medium?	Medium
Anticipated effort	High (low) to the extent that physical or mental exertion seems necessary (unnecessary).	Low?	High
Individual control	High (low) if events are seen as being caused by individual (situational) agency.	Low	High
Others' responsibility	High (low) if someone else (self) appears to be responsible.	High	High
<i>Appraisal tendency</i>	"hypothesized mechanism through which emotions activate a cognitive and motivational predisposition to appraise future events according to appraisal dimensions that triggered the emotion (emotion-to-cognition)" (807).	Other is superior to self.	Offense against self.
<i>Action tendency</i>	"set of responses (physiological, behavioral, experiential, and communication (that enable individuals to address encountered problems or opportunities quickly)" (808).	- Improve one's own situation. - Reduce status of other.	Restore justice, hold individuals responsible.
<i>Influence on outcome</i>	Political mobilization.	Ambiguous—mobilizing if malicious envy.	Mobilizing.

Sources: Keltner and Lerner (2010); van de Ven et al. (2009, 2012); Lerner et al. (2015)

In conclusion, the literature on emotions and decision-making clearly indicate that affective factors are an important channel by which politicians can mobilize for specific policies or during electoral campaigns. The ANC's decision to support a motion to investigate the possibility of a constitutional amendment to introduce land expropriation without compensation represents a major and high-risk policy reversal on land redistribution. Furthermore, land redistribution is a clear instance of a policy that is closely tied to emotions as well as material

³ Lerner and colleagues do not directly focus on envy and appear to be engaging with a different set of literature from the research on envy, which uses alternative cognitive appraisal frameworks (e.g. van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2012). I have therefore begun to hypothesize its position on these varying appraisal dimensions.

⁴ Keltner and Lerner (2010) identify two additional dimensions: perceived obstacle and legitimacy.

⁵ Conceptually equivalent to valence.

self-interest, thereby presenting an opportunity for emotional entrepreneurs to disrupt the political equilibrium. While it is currently unclear whether this particular issue will affect electoral outcomes in 2019 or if it will have an enduring impact on party politics in South Africa, it is at least theoretically interesting a clear instance of issue-based mobilization in an environment with relatively weak electoral accountability. One potential test of my argument is to research whether any of the other opposition parties have tried to mobilize around this issue in past elections (and why those efforts failed) with a particular focus on strategies during the ANC's last leadership struggle (prior to the May 2009 election).

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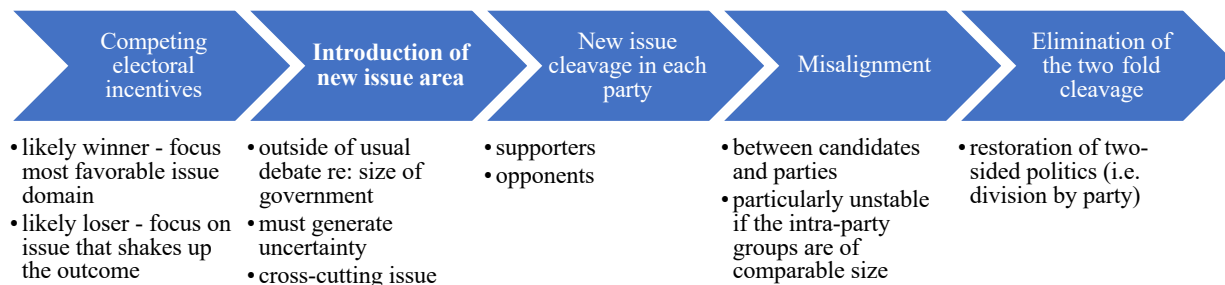
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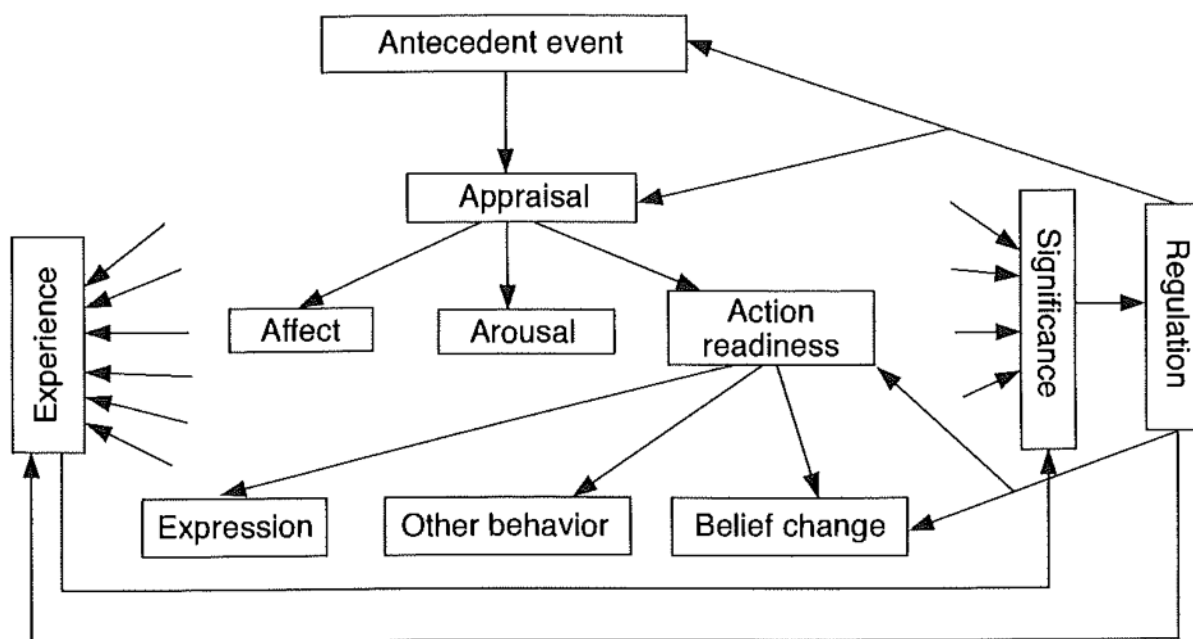
Appendix

Figure 1: Theory of issue emergence and alignment



Source: Stimson (2004).

Figure 2: The emotion process



Source: Frijda and Mesquita (1998, 276)

Frijda, Nico H, and Batja Mesquita. "Beliefs through Emotions." Chapter 3 in *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*. Edited by Nico H. Frijda, Antony S R Manstead, and Sacha Bem. Cambridge University Press, 2000. © Cambridge University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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