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The emotional underpinning of partisanship and vote choice

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## Abstract

In this paper we examine the impact of emotions on vote choice and the role of partisanship. According to our model, emotional responses toward political parties are key determinants of partisanship, which in turn is the primary determinant of vote choice. We employ a novel series of items to measure partisanship in terms of two components: partisan self-identity (party identification) and attitudes toward individual parties (party evaluations). Survey data were collected from a sample of students (n=171) in Italy, which is a typical example of a multi-party parliamentary system. Emotional responses toward each of the five major parties were structured along three dimensions: enthusiasm, anxiety and aversion. Analyses using structural equation modeling indicate that enthusiasm and aversion had distinct effects on both components of partisanship, whereas anxiety had no impact. Both partisanship components in turn influenced vote choice and completely mediated the effects of emotion. These findings suggest that partisanship is best conceptualized in terms of two components (self-identity and attitudes), which both play a pivotal role in linking positively and negatively valenced emotions to vote choice.

Keywords: emotions; voting behavior; partisanship; party identification

## Introduction

The impact of emotions on behavior has long been neglected in the social sciences, but the tide has clearly changed. Recent decades have shown a wide range of studies that demonstrate that the way people behave is influenced by the emotions they experience. The study of voting behavior is no exception. The first studies that showed that feelings like pride and hope, or anger and anxiety, had an impact on people's choices in elections date back to the 1980s (e.g., Abelson, Kinder, Peters & Fiske, 1980; Marcus, 1988). Yet these were rather isolated studies that found little resonance in the field at large and focused only on U.S. presidential elections. Albeit emotions are still not at the heart of electoral research, more researchers have started to explore their impact (see e.g. Redlawsk, 2006; Neuman, Marcus, Crigler & MacKuen, 2007). In this paper we seek to increase our understanding of the role that emotions play in elections by shifting our focus to party-centered elections (most previous studies focused on candidate-centered elections) and examine in particular the mediating role of psychological attachments with political parties, i.e. partisanship.

The view we present in this paper asserts that emotions affect vote choice indirectly, namely through their impact on voters' partisanship. Self-evidently, this applies in particular to elections in which political parties are more central than candidates, which is (still) true for most elections in Europe. So we do not consider emotions to be direct determinants of behavior, but agree that foremost "emotions constitute feedback that facilitates cognition and learning rather than directly guiding behavior" (Baumeister, Vohs & DeWall, 2007, pp. 194-195). In the electoral context the main element of that learning concerns the formation and change of attitudes toward political parties and, potentially, self-identification with a particular party.

When exploring the mediating role of party attachments we adopt a novel conceptualization of partisanship, which combines partisanship as a social identity and partisanship as attitudes. This model of 'dual partisanship' enables us to analyze more precisely how emotions affect electoral behavior than previous studies have done. Moreover, this also enables us to analyze what component of partisanship has the strongest impact on vote choice, thus contributing to the classic and still ongoing debate about whether

partisanship is best conceptualized as a stable self-identity or as a malleable attitude (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; Fiorina, 1980; Franklin & Jackson, 1983; Green, Palmquist & Schickler, 2002). Our analysis is based on a fresh survey among a sample of Italian citizens, who completed a questionnaire about their emotional responses, partisan identity, partisan attitudes, voting intentions, and several background characteristics.

In the remainder of this paper we first discuss the theoretical background in some more detail. We summarize previous research on emotion and voting and indicate how our study links up to main theories in this field. Furthermore, we discuss the concept of partisanship and explain why a dual conceptualization in terms of both self-identity and attitudes provides a suitable basis for the analysis of the effects of emotions on voting. Against this background we then describe the research design, sample, and measures adopted, and proceed to present our results. In the final section we discuss the outcomes and their implications for the role of emotions in elections. As we will see, partisanship is indeed influenced by the emotions that voters experience and mediates their impact on voting behavior. The analyses reveal that emotional response is structured along three dimensions, which have distinct effects on both components of partisanship. This means that effects of emotion on behavior are more complex than often assumed.

## Theoretical background

### The structure of emotional response of voters

In their seminal study about the impact of emotions on voting, Abelson et al. (1982) found that emotional responses toward presidential candidates represented two factors that were to a considerable extent independent of each other: one factor corresponded with positive emotions (items about hope, pride, and sympathy) and the other with negative emotions (items about fear, anger, disgust, and uneasiness). Indices for positive and negative emotions were constructed by counting the number of different emotions that candidates had evoked. The authors examined the relationship between these emotion indices and candidate evaluations, which were operationalized as feeling thermometer scores that ranged between 0 and 100. It was found that both indices strongly correlated with candidate evaluations and

contributed substantially to the prediction of evaluation scores in addition to perceived positive and negative traits.

These findings have been replicated with respect to parties, in other countries, and by the use of different measurements (Ottati, Steenbergen & Riggle, 1992; Innes & Ahrens, 1994; Eagly, Mladinic & Otto, 1994). These studies showed that the degree to which emotions play a role may vary considerably across candidates and parties, and some evaluations appeared to be based solely on cognitive judgments. A study that focused on emotions with respect to three Australian political leaders showed that in one case (Bob Hawke) the negative emotions represented two factors: aversion (items about anger and disgust), and anxiety (items about fear and uneasiness) (Innes & Ahrens, 1994). The overall evaluations correlated more strongly with the aversion factor.

The independence of positive and negative emotions that Abelson et al. (1982) found came somewhat as a surprise for two reasons. First, with respect to traits, research had shown that positive and negative judgments correlated negatively. Second, emotions had previously been conceptualized in terms of a single bipolar valence dimension. It was expected that the experience of positive and negative emotions would be correlated negatively to each other. Today it is more custom to regard positive and negative affect as two largely independent factors (Cacioppo, Gardner & Berntson, 1997).

To understand why positive and negative emotions are not strongly correlated, insight in how emotions operate is helpful. The studies by Marcus and his colleagues (Marcus, 1988; Marcus & Mackuen, 1993; Marcus, Neuman & Mackuen, 2000) have provided useful insight. They emphasized that emotions stem from two independent brain systems. The disposition system scans for success (and failure) in engaged actions. The output of this system is emotions like enthusiasm and excitement. The surveillance system continuously scans the environment for threat. The output of this system is emotions like anxiety and fear. Marcus and colleagues emphasized that as different emotions originate in different systems, we need not expect them to be correlated. Furthermore, they argued, both sets of emotions may impact voting behavior in different ways.

## Emotion and voting

The last decades numerous studies on the impact of emotions on voters have appeared (for reviews, see Redlawsk, 2006; Neuman et al., 2007) and the question is no longer *if* emotions influence vote choice, but *how* they do. According to the theory of Affective Intelligence (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000) emotions affect electoral decisions in a double way. Positive emotions, which they label enthusiasm, influence citizens' feelings about the candidates involved and thereby indirectly influence the direction of their vote decisions. The second dimension of emotion, which the authors label anxiety, determines to what extent citizens rely on habitual behavior. High levels of anxiety create the desire to learn more about the campaign and hence increases the impact of cognitive factors (e.g. issue congruence) on the vote. The idea that emotions not only have direct effects, but also interact with other factors, was given further support by Brader (2005) in his study of emotional appeals in political advertisements: "emotionally evocative ads do not simply sway voters directly, but change the manner in which voters make choices" (p. 402). The theory of Affective Intelligence has also been the basis for studies of the role of emotions in national elections in Europe, in particular the Netherlands (Capelos, 2007; Rosema, 2007).

Whether anxiety indeed influences voting in the way that Affective Intelligence theory posits, has recently become a matter of debate. Ladd and Lenz (2008) argue that the results presented as support for Affective Intelligence can also be interpreted in terms of simpler models. Their analyses suggest that emotions and candidate evaluations are in fact directly linked, namely through transfer of affect from emotions to candidate evaluations (in particular in the case of enthusiasm) and reversed from candidate evaluations to emotions (in the cases of both enthusiasm and anxiety). The final word will surely not have been said and future research should led more light on this.

Another matter that deserves further exploration is the role of aversion, which some studies suggest plays a distinct role in addition to enthusiasm and anxiety (Marcus, 2007). Although Marcus et al. (2000) focused primarily on enthusiasm and anxiety, they mentioned that aversion may operate in a similar way as enthusiasm, namely strengthening the link between attitude and behavior (p. 165). They also report an analysis that indicates that in the

case of Bill Clinton emotional response was structured in terms of the three dimensions of enthusiasm, anxiety, and aversion (p. 160). Moreover, in other domains of politics emotional response appears to be structured along those lines (e.g. Conover & Feldman, 1986; Marcus et al., 2002, pp. 165-172).

One highly relevant albeit largely neglected question in the study of emotion and voting is what mechanisms relate emotions to vote decisions. Or, to be more specific, what is actually being influenced by emotions that ultimately translates into an effect on the vote? This question is usually not discussed explicitly, but the answer can be deduced from the dependent variables in past studies. In some analyses the mechanism linking emotions to vote decision seems a black box, since they focus on vote choice as dependent variable (e.g. Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Brader, 2005). What most other studies of emotion and voting have in common, is that the dependent variable is candidate evaluations (e.g. Abelson et al., 1980; Ottati et al., 1992; Isbell & Ottati, 2002; Ladd & Lenz, 2008), a concept that social psychologists would usually refer to as *attitudes (towards candidates)*. The underlying theoretical idea is that emotions have an impact on voting, because they influence citizens' generic evaluations of candidates. The latter are mostly tapped by a so-called feeling thermometer scale.

Indeed, the correlation between candidate evaluations and vote choice is so strong, that most factors influencing the vote do so indirectly by affecting those feelings (e.g. Brody & Page, 1973; Markus & Converse, 1979; Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida & Sullivan, 1990). The idea that emotions play such a role conforms with the affect-as-information view (Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Clore, Gasper & Garvin, 2001, p.129), which posits that affective states influence evaluative judgments because feelings are considered relevant information about the object involved. This view can also be applied to the electoral context (Isbell & Ottati, 2002). On these theoretical grounds one may expect that emotions experienced have a direct impact on candidate evaluations and thereby indirectly affect the vote. In particular circumstances emotions might also influence vote choice directly, but we believe that this is the exception rather than the rule.

Most studies about the impact of emotions on voting have been conducted in the American context where the competition is usually between *candidates* and hence candidate evaluations are central. In the European context, however, the competition is primarily one between *political parties*. Even though party leaders are relevant, the act of voting (still) depends foremost on how voters evaluate the political parties and the direct impact of leader evaluations is modest (see e.g. King, 2002; Rosema, 2006). It might then appear straightforward to focus on evaluations of parties instead, thus merely replacing the attitude object focused on. However, in electoral research feelings about political parties have been conceptualized differently than those toward candidates. It is for that reason that in the next section we discuss the conceptualization of partisanship in more detail.

#### Dual partisanship

Previous studies have defined voters' attachments with political parties either in terms of party identification, which links up to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), or in terms of attitudes. Bartle and Bellucci (2008), for example, contrast these as the two major alternative approaches to partisanship. In the American literature partisanship is mostly conceptualized in terms of a social identity and hence is referred to by the notion of party identification (cf. Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002). The impact of party identification on voting behavior has been strong ever since it was first measured in the 1950s (Bartels, 2000). In the European context scholars have questioned the usefulness of the concept, arguing that party identification cannot be meaningfully distinguished from vote choice (Thomassen, 1976; Thomassen & Rosema, 2008). Moreover, vote choice has long been structured according to lines of social cleavages and the target of identification may not have been political parties per se, but the social groups they link up with, such as the working class or specific religious groups. Hence, in the European context conceptualizing partisanship in terms of party identification is problematic. If partisanship is conceptualized in terms of attitudes, some of the problems observed in relation to party identification can be overcome (Rosema, 2006).



One important reason why applying the concept of party identification to the European context did not appear fruitful, is that the measures traditionally used to operationalize the concept could virtually not be distinguished from vote choice (Thomassen & Rosema, 2008). If asked whether they identified with a particular political party, voters just reported the same party as the one they voted for. As an explanatory factor the concept then becomes rather meaningless for the analysis of vote choice, especially if it also does not appear to be more stable than vote choice, like it was in the United States. This could be just a measurement problem, though. Election surveys typically ask respondents which party they feel close to, and it may well be that such questions tap vote preferences rather than a social identity. This measurement problem was also identified by Greene (1999, 2002), who proclaimed the use of questions that better link up to social identity theory.

At the conceptual level the key question is whether political parties are indeed object of self identification, like the scholars who introduced the concept (Campbell, Gurin & Miller, 1954; Campbell et al., 1954, 1960) posited. Although the social structure of Western European societies might have made the need for such a self-identity less strong, we cannot exclude the possibility that some voters still perceive themselves as partisans and that this is part of their social identity. Moreover, with the weakening of the social structure upon which the party system has long been based (cf. Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), the need for partisan identities might become stronger than when the vote decision could be based on such matters as class position or religious affiliation.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that many citizens do not feel particularly attached to any political party. However, this does not imply they are indifferent. Indeed, also voters who report no partisan identity do have attitudes toward political parties. To understand why people vote as they do, these attitudes are highly relevant. Moreover, even partisans have attitudes toward their own party as well as the opposite party that are not the same thing as their identification. Self-identity and attitudes toward the group of identification are, albeit strongly correlated, distinct phenomena (Greenwald et al., 2002). Indeed, several scholars have examined the relationship between partisanship as self-identity and partisanship in terms

of attitudes toward the in-group and out-group and considered these separate components (Greene, 2004; Groenendyk, 2008).

We build on these ideas and findings and argue that voters have a dual psychological attachment with political parties. First, they may consider themselves a partisan and identify with one of the political parties. This means that being attached to a particular political party is part of their social identity and they experience a sense of belonging with fellow partisans. This is the self-identify component of partisanship. Second, voters have attitudes toward political parties, which may be positive or negative and in varying degrees. This is the attitudinal component of partisanship. Emotions could in principle affect either component of partisanship. We consider this to be an empirical question, which we will address in this paper by analyzing both in a single framework.

#### The Italian political system

Before we proceed with describing the details of our empirical study, let us briefly describe its context: the Italian political system. Most research on emotions and voting has been conducted in the American context, which has particular features. First, those elections are candidate-centered, whereas parliamentary elections in other parts of the world elections focus more strongly on political parties. Second, the United States have an almost pure two-party system, which also is the exception rather than the rule in other democracies. Third, the party system in the United States has been stable throughout the last decades, enabling citizens to develop partisan attachments over a long period of time. Although most established democracies share this feature, especially the new democracies are in a different position.

The Italian political context is rather different and resembles features of many other democracies. First, even though in parliamentary elections there is a personal element due to its impact on the subsequent selection of the prime minister, the election is foremost a competition between political parties. Second, the party system lacks strong political forces like the Democratic and Republican party in the U.S. and is instead composed by several smaller parties. Electoral reform in 1993 made elections for both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate mainly majoritarian, thus promoting the formation of coalitions between parties.

Yet a new reform in December 2005 reintroduced proportional representation, although the rules differ between both Houses. The Chamber of Deputies is elected on the basis of proportional representation in a single nation-wide constituency with a majority bonus added. The Senate is elected on the basis of proportional representation at the regional level. This system has led to a multi party system, with none of the parties being able to gain a majority on its own. To understand the role of emotions, it is therefore crucial to look at several parties and explore emotions toward each. Finally, it is custom that the offer changes at every new election. This means that habitual voting, which is common in the United States, cannot play the same role in Italy. In brief, the Italian political context differs substantially from the American one and it thus remains to be seen if findings obtained there can be replicated here.

## Method

### Participants and procedure

Participants were 171 Italian students, who took part in programs in the Faculty of Psychology at the Universities of Milan-Bicocca and Padova. They were recruited during lessons or through a Faculty web recruitment system (Sona System) and voluntarily completed a web questionnaire (Inquisit). The sample comprised 40 males and 130 females (one respondent did not reported the gender) with a mean age of 22.2 years (S.D. = 4.43). The study was carried out between February and March 2009. The questionnaire contained questions about the five major parties in the Italian Parliament at the moment of the survey. Moving from the left to the right of the ideological continuum these are: the Democratic Party (PD), Italia dei Valori (IDV), Union of Center (UDC), Popolo della Libertà (PDL), and Lega Nord (Lega). Respondents were informed that items were presented in accordance with left/right positions in parliament.

### Measures

*Emotions.* Emotional responses toward the five parties were measured on the basis of a set of ten items for each party, which asked respondents to indicate on a seven-point scale how often they experienced a particular emotion. The end-points were labeled as 'never' (1) and 'always' (7). The question literally read as follows: "How often does [party's name] evoke

the following emotions in you?”. The ten emotions included were anger, trust, fear, pride, irritation, worry, respect, admiration, contempt, and resentment. The first eight were directly inspired by previous studies (discussed in the preceding), while we added the latter two in order to enable more fine-tuned analysis of the structure of emotional response and increase the reliability of the measurement. Our measures meet the recommendations by Marcus, MacKuen, Wolak and Keele (2006) to include measures of aversion and avoid likert scales with emotion pairs. These authors also concluded that asking “how often have you felt...” is an appropriate question format, but that in practice questions about frequency of emotions and about intensity of emotions lead to similar results.

*Partisanship.* We measured partisanship in terms of two components: party identification and party evaluations. To measure party identification electoral studies usually rely on a single measure of self-categorization that is complemented with a follow-up question about the strength of identification (Campbell et al., 1960). Such measures have several weaknesses, including the problem that in many democracies they seem to merely reflect the direction of the vote (Rosema, 2006; Thomassen & Rosema, 2008). We therefore adopt measures that link up more closely to self-identity theory (cf. Greene, 1999, 2002). Moreover, we used this measure for each party, thus enabling the measurement of multiple identification.

We adapted seven items from the scale of Capozza, Brown, Aharpour & Falvo (2006). This scale measures four components of social identity (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981): the evaluative component (“I evaluate positively the adherents to [party]” and “It is prestigious to be an adherent of [party]”); the affective component (“I feel attached to the adherents of [party]” and “I would feel uncomfortable if media criticize the adherents to [party]”); self-stereotyping (“I perceive myself similar to the adherents of [party]” and “When I evaluate myself, I often use values and standard of the adherents to [party]”); and awareness of belonging (“I often see myself as an adherent to [party]”). Respondents reported the degree of agreement with each statement on a seven-point scale ranging from “completely disagree” (1) to “completely agree” (7); the mid-point was labeled “neither disagree, nor agree”.

The attitudinal component of partisanship (party evaluations) was measured by asking respondents to evaluate each individual party on the basis of a 0-100 rating scale, analogous with the widely used feeling thermometer that asks respondents how favorable or unfavorable they feel about candidates or parties. Likewise, on this scale one end-point was labeled "0° extremely unfavorable" and the other end-point "100° extremely favorable"; the mid-point was labeled "50° neither unfavorable, nor favorable". This measure links up to the view that evaluating an object with some degree of favor or disfavor is the central element of attitudes (e.g. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Although the measure has 101 categories, in practice it operates as an eleven-point scale. Such a feeling thermometer scale was found more reliable and valid than a traditional seven-point scale (Alwin, 1997).

*General political orientation.* In Italian politics an ideological divide between left and right plays an important role, like in most Western European democracies. It was measured in our survey with a nine-point scale, anchored by "I am close to the political position of the left" (1) and "I am close to the political position of the right", with the mid-point indicating the uncertainty.

*Voting intentions.* Election surveys adopt two kind of measures for vote choice. In pre-election surveys citizens are typically asked for which party they will vote in the upcoming election, whereas in post-election surveys they are asked which party they voted for in the past election. Often such questions are accompanied by additional questions, which ask the parties citizens consider to vote for. Self-evidently, such questions can only be asked around elections that are actually held at that moment. In the absence of actual elections, a widely employed measure asks people how they would vote "if there would be a national election tomorrow" (e.g. see the European Election Study).

We adopt a similar measure, but allow for more precision than the dichotomous "will vote/will not vote" and instead asked about the likelihood of voting for each party on a seven-point scale. We employed a combination of two measures: one about a hypothetical national election "tomorrow" and one about the actual upcoming elections for the European Parliament in June 2009. The questions were worded as follows: "Imagine that you have to vote tomorrow in the election. What is your intention to vote for [party]?" and "In June 2009 there will be the

Elections for the European Parliament. What is your intention to vote for [party]?”. The scale ranged from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (7), while the mid-point was labeled “neither unlikely, nor likely”.

#### Method of analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to test the adequacy of the measurement models of emotions and partisanship, whereas path analysis was used to test the theoretical framework (LISREL program; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999). The goodness-of-fit was evaluated by the  $\chi^2$  test. Satisfactory fits are obtained when the  $\chi^2$  test is non-significant. However, this test is particularly sensitive to sample size. Indeed, with small samples even large discrepancies between the model and the observed data may go undetected. In contrast, with bigger samples negligible discrepancies may yield significant chi-square values (Bentler, 1990; Bagozzi & Baumgartner, 1994). For such a reason other indexes, which are independent from sample size, were examined as well: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMS). Satisfactory model fits are obtained when CFI is greater than or equal to .95, and when SRMR is less than or equal to .05 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; for discussion concerning these indexes, see also Bentler, 1990; Steiger, 1990; Marsch, Balla & Hau, 1996; Rigdon, 1996). The chi-square difference test was applied for nested models.

### Results

#### The structure of emotion: CFA analysis

We first focus on the structure of emotional response. Based on previous research and the considerations discussed in the theoretical section, we hypothesize that emotions toward a specific political party involve three latent factors: enthusiasm, anxiety and aversion. The factor of enthusiasm should involve the positive emotions toward the party (trust, pride, respect, and admiration). Concerning the negative emotions we expect a division: worry and fear should load on the anxiety factor, whereas anger, irritation, contempt, and resentment should represent the aversion factor. We investigate this hypothesis by running a series of CFA analyses with LISREL, one for each of the five parties. This method allows factors to be

correlated, which is an important feature in the analysis of the structure of emotional response (Marcus et al, 2006, p. 35).

The results (see Table 1) show that the hypothesized trifactor structure fit the data well for all the parties: PD,  $\chi^2(32) = 80.83$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .059, CFI = .98; IDV,  $\chi^2(32) = 124.91$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .063, CFI = .97; UDC,  $\chi^2(32) = 101.31$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .067; CFI = .97; PDL,  $\chi^2(32) = 96.65$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .027, CFI = .99; Lega Nord:  $\chi^2(32) = 88.49$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .023, CFI = .99. In each model, even if chi-square is significant, the two other indexes respect the relevant criterion. In addition, factor loadings are high and consistent. Convergent validity is achieved, because the measures load only on the respective factor. It is worth noting that for each party the trifactor model performs better than a bifactor model that distinguishes emotions on the basis of their valence.

[ Tables 1 and 2 about here ]

The three latent constructs are clearly correlated with each other (see Table 2). As expected, aversion and anxiety correlated positively, whereas both of these factors correlated negatively with enthusiasm. Despite these correlations the factors are distinguishable. Discriminant validity emerges from the fact that the latent variables show correlations lower than 1.00. The confidence interval, obtained by considering two standard errors above and two standard errors below the estimate correlation ( $p = .05$ ), does not include the perfect correlation. In brief, these results support the distinction between enthusiasm, aversion and anxiety as three distinct dimensions of emotion.

The structure of partisanship: CFA analysis

To investigate the structure of partisanship we again use CFA analysis with LISREL. The aim is to examine if our measures of party identification and party evaluations indeed represent two distinct components of partisanship. This implies that the analysis will reveal a bifactor structure. We run five models with all items of partisanship, one model for each party. The results confirm our expectations, as they show a bifactor structure in which the party identification items load on one factor and the feeling thermometer loads on a separate factor.

[ Table 3 about here ]

We first applied the partial disaggregation model to identification items (cf. Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998; Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994): they were randomly aggregated in order to obtain four indicators (one item was maintained separately). Results (see Table 3) showed that for each party the bifactor structure performed adequately: PD,  $\chi^2(5) = 27.40$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .026, CFI = .98; IDV,  $\chi^2(5) = 40.30$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .038, CFI = .96; UDC,  $\chi^2(5) = 36.75$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .039, CFI = .96; PDL,  $\chi^2(5) = 17.96$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .024, CFI = .99;  $\chi^2(5) = 33.08$ ,  $p \cong .00$ , SRMR = .028, CFI = .97. Moreover, the two latent factors of partisanship, even though they are strongly correlated, are still distinguishable: the confidence intervals, obtained by considering two standard errors above and two standard errors below the estimate correlations ( $p = .05$ ), do not include the perfect correlation. These results suggest that party identification and party evaluation are empirically distinguishable components of partisanship.

#### Descriptive statistics

Because of the structure of emotions and partisanship revealed in the above analyses, after checking for alphas, we compute composite scores for the three emotion factors as well as party identification (for party evaluations this is not necessary, as it was measured with a single item). All four indexes are characterized by (highly) satisfactory levels of reliability: for all parties the alphas were greater than .92 for enthusiasm, greater than .80 for anxiety, and greater than .89 for aversion. Alphas for the party identification index are greater than .94. Finally, we also create a composite score for voting intention for each party by combining both items (voting in a national election 'tomorrow' and voting in the European Parliament election in June). Again, alphas were satisfactory in all cases and greater than .93.

[ Table 4 about here ]

The means and standard deviations of all scores are reported in Table 4, which also indicates if the observations differ from the neutral or central point of each scale (t-test). The findings concerning the means suggest that the emotional responses evoked by parties are not extremely intense, as the average is below the mid-point of each scale. Participants only reported high levels of anxiety and aversion with respect to the right wing parties, PDL and Lega Nord. Concerning the partisan identification, for each party the average strength of



identification is not strong and below the mid-point of the scale. This should be no surprise, as in a multi-party system citizens have a range of options and for an individual party the number of identifiers will be lower than in a two-party system. Finally, the results indicate that our sample as a whole was slightly oriented towards the left ideologically ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $DS = 2.23$ ,  $t(170) = -4.39$ ,  $p < .001$ .). This matches with the finding that the average evaluation score awarded to the left-wing parties is more positive than those concerning the right-wing parties. The same pattern can be observed with respect to voting intentions.

### Testing the models

Path analysis with LISREL (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999) is used to test our expectations about the effects of emotions on vote choice and the mediating role of partisanship. The hypothesis is that partisanship in terms of party identification and evaluation mediates the effects of the three emotion categories on voting intentions. We have no strong expectations about which component of partisanship is affected to what degree by each emotional dimension, but it is possible that differences will be observed. Furthermore, although we expect that both components of partisanship strongly affect voting intentions, the degree to which each does have such an effect is an empirical question.

Because political orientation could have effects on the patterns suggested, we performed the following series of analyses by considering the partial correlation matrixes among variables as input. In fact, removing the statistical effects of political orientation is a way to control for it.

We first focus on the Democratic Party (see Figure 1). The tested model fits the data quite well:  $\chi^2(4) = 58.13$ ,  $p \cong .00$ ; CFI = .93; RSRM = .074. In fact, even though the  $\chi^2$  is significant, SRMR complied well with the respective criterion. Concerning CFI, it should be noted that the proposed criterion's cut-off ( $\leq .95$ ) is very conservative. In fact, according to some authors, cut-off values greater than .90 for CFI are acceptable (Bentler, 1990).

As shown in Figure 1, the model accounted for a large proportion of the variance in voting intentions (52%), as well as in partisanship (41% for identification and 54% for evaluation). The findings reveal that both party identification and party evaluation influenced

the intention to vote for this party. The effect of feeling thermometer ( $\beta_{32} = .64, p < .001$ ) was stronger than for identification ( $\beta_{31} = .16, p < .001$ ). Concerning the emotional underpinning, enthusiasm affected both identification and evaluation in a positive way ( $\gamma_{11} = .64$  and  $\gamma_{21} = .52$ , respectively,  $ps < .001$ ), whereas party evaluation was also negatively affected by aversion ( $\gamma_{32} = -.23, p < .001$ ). Interestingly, anxiety did not predict partisanship.

We now consider Italia dei Valori (Figure 2). The proposed model fit the data well:  $\chi^2(4) = 24.83, p \cong .00$ ; CFI= .98; RSRM = .043. This model also accounts for a large proportion of variance in voting intentions (52%), as well as in both components of partisanship (49% for party identification and 56% for party evaluation). The above findings for PD are nicely replicated: identification and evaluation influenced the intentions to vote for IDV, but the effect of the feeling thermometer was stronger ( $\beta_{32} = .51, p < .001$ ) than the effect of the party identification index ( $\beta_{31} = .31, p < .001$ ). Again, enthusiasm affected both party identification and party evaluation in a positive way ( $\gamma_{11} = .61$  and  $\gamma_{21} = .57$ , respectively,  $ps < .001$ ), whereas party evaluations were also negatively affected by aversion ( $\gamma_{32} = -.28, p < .001$ ). No effects were again found for anxiety.

[ Figures 1 to 5 about here ]

To cut a long story short, we find very similar patterns for the three other parties: Union of Center, Popolo della Liberta, and Lega Nord (see Figures 3 to 5). Voting intentions are strongly influenced by both party identification and party evaluation, albeit their relative impact varies between parties. Lega Nord stands out as a special case, as the impact of party identification ( $\beta_{31} = .57, p < .001$ ) was clearly stronger than that of party evaluation ( $\beta_{32} = .32, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, the Union of Center shows rather similar effects for both components of partisanship. The explained variance of voting intentions is rather high across the models, as it varies between .47 and .63.

Concerning the emotional underpinning, the general pattern is replicated almost exactly: without exception enthusiasm had an effect on both components of partisanship, whereas aversion only had an impact of party evaluations. Here the only exception is the evaluation of Lega Nord, which was not affected by aversion ratings (it is worthwhile noting,

however, that the standard error of this parameter is very high: non standardized  $\gamma = -2.14$ , SE = 1.67). Anxiety again does not exert any influence on partisanship, whatever party is focused on. The explained variance of both components of partisanship varies between .41 and .58, revealing considerable explanatory power for the emotion factors. The only exception is the evaluation of Popolo della Libertà, which provides a lower score ( $R^2 = .29$ ). Finally, for none of the three other parties do we find a direct effect of any of the emotion dimensions on voting intentions. Their effects are fully mediated by the two components of partisanship.

#### Testing the mediating role of partisanship

In the last step of the analysis we further test our hypothesis that partisanship mediates the impact of emotion and explore the possibility of residual direct effects of emotion on voting intentions. The alternative hypothesis of partial mediation by partisanship is investigated by performing a series of nested models. Thus, the model including each direct path is compared to the baseline model (see Figure 1). Chi-square difference tests are computed to check for significance of these direct paths. When the chi-square difference is non-significant, the two components of partisanship operate as a full mediator of the effect of the emotion variables on voting intentions. In contrast, a significant direct path indicates a partial mediation (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001).

[ Table 5 about here ]

With respect to the Democratic Party (PD) the findings show that party identification and party evaluation totally absorbed the effects of the three dimensions of emotion (Table 5). The fact that chi-square differences are always non-significant confirms that partisanship completely mediated the effects of emotions on voting intentions. The same results are obtained for the four other parties. Partisanship seems to play a crucial role with respect to the impact of emotions in the electoral process: it works as a catalyst that ultimately transforms emotional reactions into a decision to vote in a particular way.

## Conclusion

What are the main conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of the analyses presented? In the first place our findings suggest that emotions have a strong impact on vote choice in Italian elections. This is interesting, because past studies have predominantly focused on candidate-centered elections, in particular those for the American presidency (e.g. Abelson et al., 1980; Marcus et al., 2000; Isbell & Ottati, 2002). Our findings suggest that similar emotional influences operate in parliamentary systems in Europe, confirming exploratory studies in the Netherlands (Capelos, 2007; Rosema, 2007). To fully test this presumption, however, additional research is needed. One important limitation of our study is that cognitive factors were not included in the models. Further research will have to demonstrate to what extent the emotions experienced by Italian voters reflect positively or negatively evaluated beliefs about the parties and whether these emotional responses are grounded in factors such as ideology, policy, the economy, or approval of government performance.

Second, our study provides support for the view that to increase our understanding of the role of emotion in voting, negatively valenced emotions that may be referred to by the notion of aversion (e.g., feelings like irritation, anger, and disgust) need to be included in the models (cf. Marcus, 2007). Whereas previous studies have focused on anxiety (e.g. feelings like fear and worry) as the most relevant set of negative emotion, our analyses showed that aversion is distinct from anxiety and also has different effects. Whereas anxiety was found to have virtually no direct effect of partisanship and vote choice (cf. Marcus et al., 2000), aversion did have a clear impact. More specifically, aversion influenced the attitudes towards four of the five parties we analyzed.

This brings us to a third element of our contribution. We used a novel conceptualization of partisanship, by combining the social psychological concepts of self-identity (Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1987) and attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In American electoral research partisanship is usually conceptualized in terms of self-identity (party identification, cf. Campbell et al., 1960). Confronted with problems of the concept as well as its measurement in European electoral research, we have proposed to use an alternative conceptualization in Europe, namely in terms of attitudes (Rosema, 2006; Thomassen & Rosema, 2008). In this

study we have combined both, building on the idea that voters not only hold attitudes, but also may identify with a political party. We have overcome the problems associated with the party identification concept by using a different operationalization, namely an index of seven items that reflect four dimensions of self-identity (cf. Capozza et al., 2006). A Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrated that the party identification index can be empirically distinguished from party evaluations, which were tapped by a feeling thermometer scale.

Finally, the main part of the analysis demonstrated that this concept of 'dual partisanship' proved useful for analyzing the impact of emotion on voting. For the five parties that we examined, the patterns were strikingly similar. Enthusiasm had a strong effect on party identification as well as party evaluations. Aversion also had an impact, albeit only on the attitudinal component; party identification was not affected by these negative feelings. Contrary to these two dimensions of emotion, anxiety did not have a direct impact on partisanship or vote choice. Furthermore, partisanship fully mediated the effects of the positively and negatively valenced emotions. This means that emotions do not directly lead voters to make a particular decision in an election, but they provide an important basis for developing dispositions with respect to the political parties. When an election is held the partisan attachments thus developed are the primary basis to make a vote decision, thereby creating behavioral consequences of emotions experienced in an earlier stage.

Table 1. CFA analyses with latent variables for emotional responses toward parties.

Latent factors	Completely standardized factor loadings				
	PD	IDV	.UDC	PDL	Lega Nord
<b>Enthusiasm</b>					
trust	.92	.93	.86	.93	.94
pride	.86	.91	.89	.95	.94
respect	.83	.92	.83	.93	.93
admiration	.91	.96	.90	.93	.94
<b>Anxiety</b>					
fear	.88	.89	.86	.94	.93
worry	.78	.83	.86	.95	.92
<b>Aversion</b>					
anger	.87	.88	.87	.94	.90
irritation	.91	.90	.88	.95	.93
contempt	.82	.87	.85	.91	.89
resentment	.70	.73	.79	.82	.75

*Note.* PD = Democratic Party; IDV = Italia dei valori; UDC = Union of Centre; PDL = Popolo delle Libertà. All the factor loadings are significant,  $ps < .001$ .

Table 2. Correlations between latent factors of emotions toward parties.

Latent factors	PD			IDV			.UDC			PDL			Lega Nord		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1 Enthusiasm	/			/			/			/			/		
2 Anxiety	-.34	/		-.45	/		-.20	/		-.79	/		-.76	/	
3 Aversion	-.73	.71	/	-.74	.77	/	-.53	.83	/	-.89	.92	/	-.89	.91	/

*Note.* PD = Democratic Party; IDV = Italia dei valori; UDC = Union of Centre; PDL = Popolo delle Libertà. All the correlations are significant,  $ps < .01$ .

Table 3. CFA analyses with latent constructs for partisanship.

Latent factors	Completely standardized factor loadings				
	PD	IDV	.UDC	PDL	Lega Nord
Bifactor structure					
of partisanship:					
Identification					
Indicator 1	.97	.96	.96	.98	.98
Indicator 2	.88	.87	.85	.88	.80
Indicator 3	.93	.94	.91	.97	.97
Indicator 4	.70	.65	.63	.77	.67
Evaluation					
Indicator 1	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Correlation $\varphi$	.83	.80	.72	.82	.84

*Note.* PD = Democratic Party; IDV = Italia dei valori; UDC = Union of Centre; PDL = Popolo delle Libertà. All the factor loadings and correlations are significant,  $ps < .001$ .



Table 4. Means and standard deviations for all the relevant constructs.

Emotional factors	PD		IDV		.UDC		PDL		Lega Nord	
	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>
Enthusiasm	3.61***	1.18	3.74*	1.48	2.95***	1.08	2.78***	1.61	2.60***	1.57
Anxiety	3.18***	1.24	2.99***	1.31	3.41***	1.27	4.48***	1.67	4.66***	1.59
Aversion	3.38***	1.26	3.03***	1.28	3.68**	1.26	4.54***	1.71	4.59***	1.71
Party identification										
Party	56.32**	25.11	54.50*	28.35	38.83***	22.54	30.41***	30.82	27.54***	31.56
evaluation										
Voting intentions										
Voting	3.86	2.05	3.64*	2.10	2.36***	1.51	2.54***	2.05	2.17***	1.83

*Note.* PD = Democratic Party; IDV = Italia dei valori; UDC = Union of Centre; PDL = Popolo delle Libertà. All the means are significantly different from the neutral or central point (50 for feeling thermometer and 4 in all other case) of the scale (*t*-tests), \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 5. Test for sufficiency of mediation of partisanship factors.

Political party	Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2_d$	<i>p</i> <
PD	Baseline	58.13	4	-	-
	Enthusiasm → I	56.15	3	1.98	<i>ns</i>
	Anxiety → I	56.74	3	1.39	<i>ns</i>
	Aversion → I	57.67	3	.46	<i>ns</i>
IDV	Baseline	24.83	4	-	-
	Enthusiasm → I	23.16	3	1.67	<i>ns</i>
	Anxiety → I	24.66	3	.17	<i>ns</i>
	Aversion → I	24.31	3	.52	<i>ns</i>
UDC	Baseline	46.35	4	-	-
	Enthusiasm → I	46.33	3	.02	<i>ns</i>
	Anxiety → I	45.44	3	.91	<i>ns</i>
	Aversion → I	44.49	3	1.86	<i>ns</i>
PDL	Baseline	10.83	4		
	Enthusiasm → I	8.74	3	2.09	<i>ns</i>
	Anxiety → I	8.49	3	2.34	<i>ns</i>
	Aversion → I	8.19	3	2.64	<i>ns</i>
Lega Nord	Baseline	8.75	4	-	-
	Enthusiasm → I	8.72	3	.03	<i>ns</i>
	Anxiety → I	6.82	3	1.93	<i>ns</i>
	Aversion → I	7.93	3	.82	<i>ns</i>

Note. PD = Democratic Party; IDV = Italia dei valori; UDC = Union of Centre; PDL = Popolo delle Libertà. I = PD voting intentions.

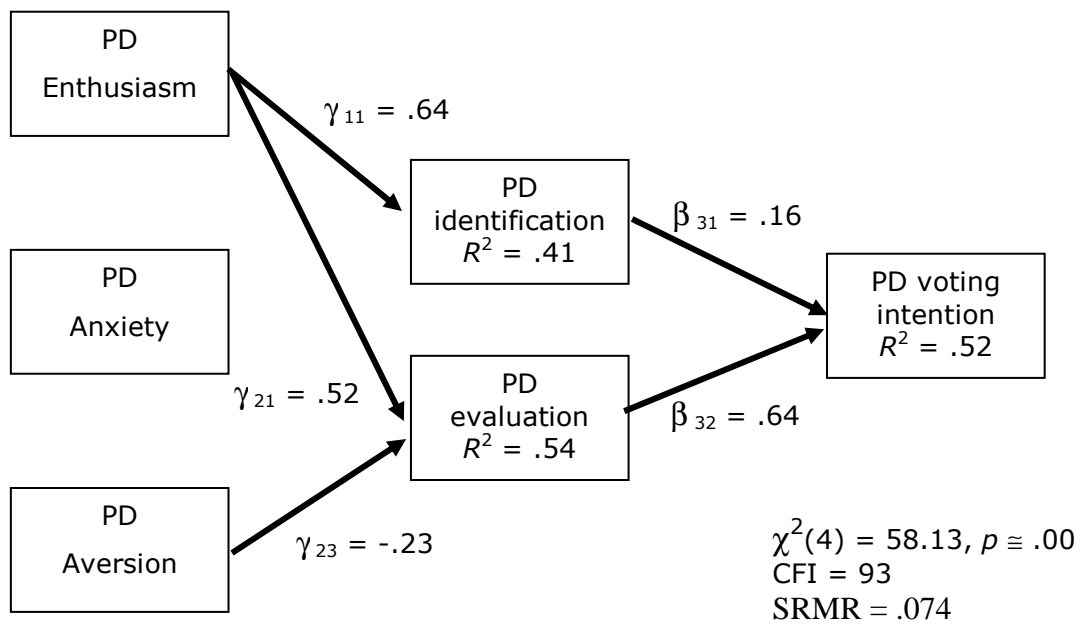


Figure 1. Emotional underpinning of partisanship and Democratic Party voting intention.

Note. For the sake of simplicity, only significant paths are reported ( $p < .01$ ).

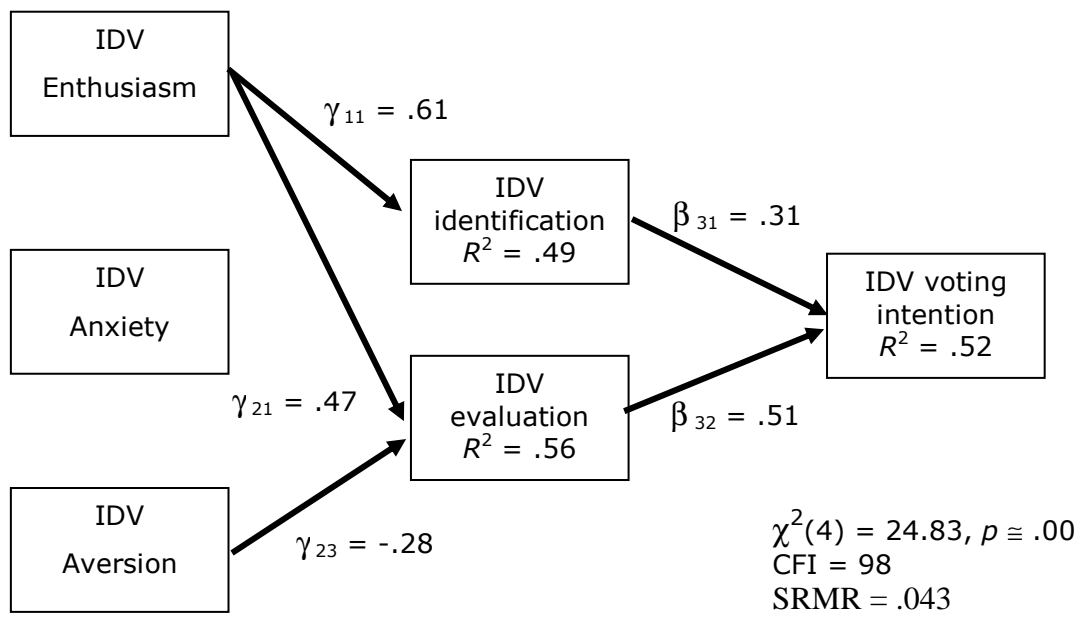


Figure 2. Emotional underpinning of partisanship and Italia dei Valori voting Intention.

Note. For the sake of simplicity, only significant paths are reported ( $p < .01$ ).

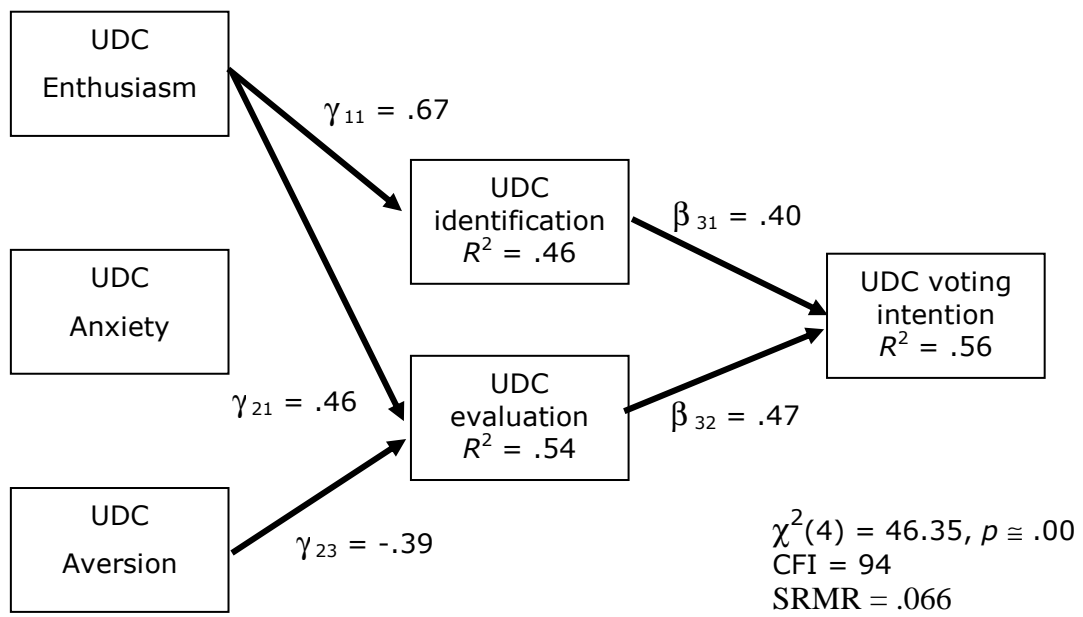


Figure 3. Emotional underpinning of partisanship and Union of Center voting intention.

Note. For the sake of simplicity, only significant paths are reported ( $p < .001$ ).

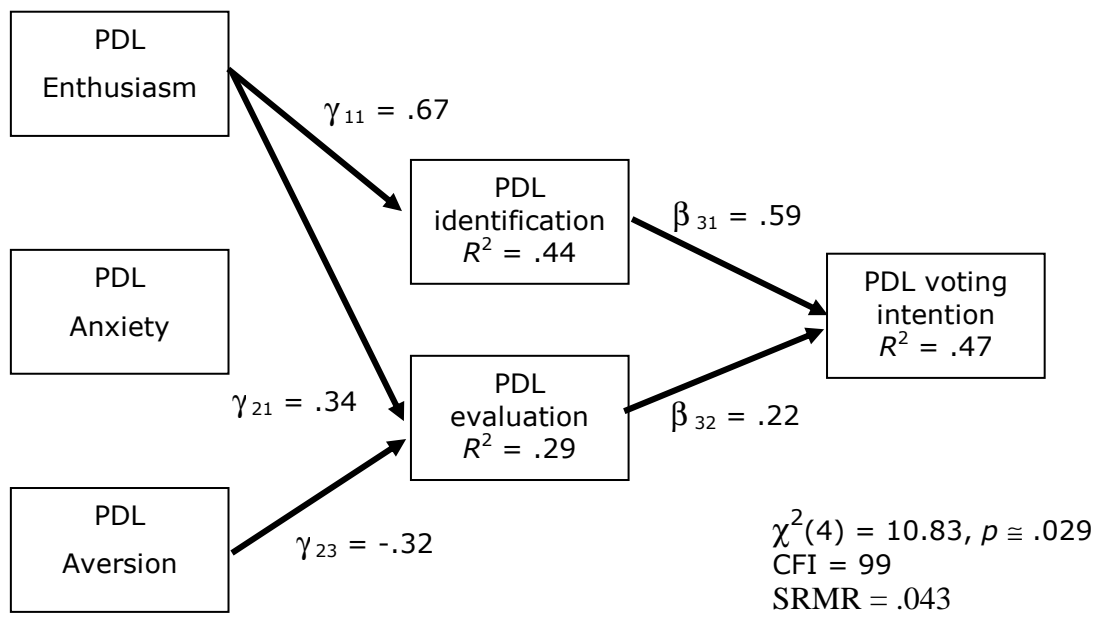


Figure 4. Emotional underpinning of partisanship and Popolo della Libertà voting intention.

Note. For the sake of simplicity, only significant paths are reported ( $p < .01$ ).

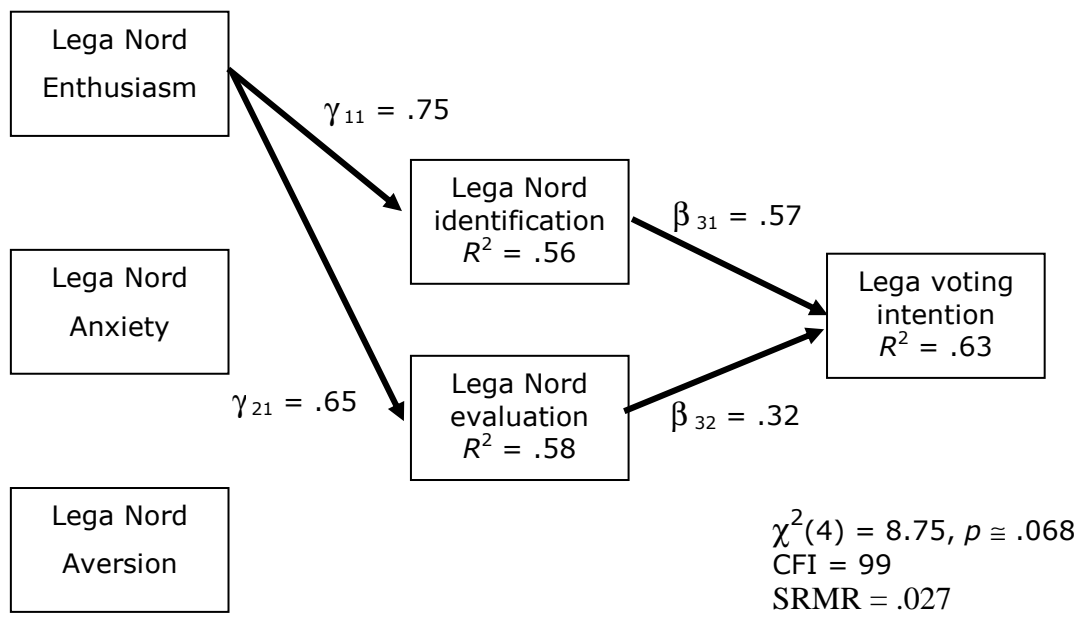


Figure 5. Emotional underpinning of partisanship and Lega Nord voting intention.

Note. For the sake of simplicity, only significant paths are reported ( $p < .001$ ).

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