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Rage to reach: Anger as a political resource for newcomer parties – Facebook communication of German and Hungarian parties and politicians during the 2019 and 2024 European parliamentary campaigns

<https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2025-0128>

Abstract: This study investigates the strategic use of anger in social media communication during the 2019 and 2024 European Parliamentary elections in Germany and Hungary. Since anger is typically located in the quadrant of emotions where high arousal intersects with negative valence, we argue that anger manifestations help counterbalance the resource limitations of newcomer parties to capture voters' attention on Facebook. Using refined XLM-RoBERTa models, this study compares content from newcomer and established parties and politicians. We assess whether newcomers utilise anger more frequently, especially as election days approach, and whether Hungarian parties exhibit greater anger than their German counterparts. We also explore whether anger generates more engagement and serves as a digital equaliser. Results show that newcomer parties initially leverage anger to boost engagement, especially in the polarised Hungarian context, though this effect diminishes over time, suggesting that the gap between parties in the use of anger-related campaign messages narrows.

Keywords: anger, emotions, political resource, Facebook posts, Hungary, Germany, European Parliamentary campaigns

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1 Introduction

Emotions have long played a critical role in political behaviour, but the rise of social media has intensified their visibility and strategic use, particularly during electoral campaigns. Within the framework of affective intelligence theory (Marcus et al., 2000) and the literature on emotional mobilisation (Matthes, 2022; Nabi, 1999), anger stands out as a uniquely activating emotion – capable of reducing ambivalence, increasing political engagement, and reinforcing in-group loyalty. At the same time, political novices typically lack institutional access, established reputations, or sufficient resources for strategic news management, and they face acute challenges in gaining media visibility, public attention, and legitimacy (Abedi and Lundberg, 2009; Magin et al., 2017). Recent research suggests that actors who newly enter the political arena can strategically leverage anger to polarise discourse, signal authenticity, and frame themselves as agents of disruption (Esser et al., 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Other research points out that newcomer parties successfully utilise emotional appeals as resources in political communication, especially positive emotions like hope and pride, to generate engagement and distinguish themselves from established parties (Barbeito Iglesias and Iglesias Alonso, 2021). The engagement-based nature of Facebook’s algorithm appears to favour content expressing anger, potentially resulting in disproportionate visibility and contributing to the amplification of emotionally charged, anger-laden discourse (Klinger and Svensson, 2025).

In this study, we use “newcomer” as a category referring to the electoral status of the political actors. This label marks parties and politicians without prior representation in the previous European Parliament elections. Most of these political formations adopt populist rhetoric; we therefore draw on the rich literature on populist communication as a key reference point for understanding how new challengers mobilise emotions. However, the newcomer status does not presuppose populism and stylistic markers, so this paper keeps the empirical category of newcomers broader than explicitly populist actors.

Relying on these empirical results, this paper further examines whether and how anger operates as a communicative resource for newcomer parties on Facebook during the 2019 and 2024 European Parliamentary election campaigns. Furthermore, we explore if anger-laden messaging enhances engagement and whether it serves as a digital equaliser in the asymmetrical field of social media discourse and the electoral competition in general. We consider anger as an effective resource in political communication, which can advance newcomer parties and counterbalance their handicaps in networks, financial resources or institutional access. We are especially interested in whether the role and frequency of anger increase as the day of the election gets closer. Our findings demonstrate a complex interplay between newcomer

status, anger expression, engagement, and national political culture, challenging simplistic assumptions about online political communication and emphasising the need for nuanced understanding of the contemporary digital landscape.

We pose the following central research questions:

RQ1: Do newcomer parties and politicians express anger at a higher rate than their established counterparts on Facebook?

RQ2: Does the frequency of Facebook posts textually manifesting anger increase as election day approaches?

RQ3: Do Facebook posts textually manifesting anger generate more angry reactions from the followers of newcomer parties compared to those of established parties?

To answer these questions, we conduct a comparative quantitative content analysis of Facebook posts published by political parties and individual politicians in the lead-up to the European Parliamentary elections 2019 and 2024, the last ten weeks of the election campaigns. This study contrasts Germany and Hungary: two countries with distinct yet interrelated political landscapes, making them ideal cases for comparison. In both countries, recent years have seen the emergence of new political actors seeking to challenge the established order, often employing populist or anti-establishment rhetoric. While Germany's political system remains pluralistic, Hungary has witnessed a consolidation of power around the Fidesz party, creating a constrained political environment for opposition newcomers. Germany, as the largest EU member state, represents the heart of mainstream European political discourse with its multiparty system. By contrast, Hungary has seen significant liberal democratic erosion, with the Fidesz party using populist, Eurosceptic rhetoric that creates a tense, adversarial relationship between the government and the opposition. These countries also differ in their levels of Euroscepticism and trust in EU institutions: Germany is a strong advocate for European integration, while Hungary stands out as one of the most vocal critics of the EU. By analyzing Facebook communication in these varied contexts, our study sheds light on how anger-driven messages influence campaign discourse in different political settings – including a pro-EU democracy (Germany) and an illiberal regime that openly challenges EU norms (Hungary).

While comparative research remains scarce, largely due to the high costs of studying discursive phenomena across languages (Nai and Maier, 2021), we aim to contribute cross-country insights into the study of emotions in campaigns by capitalizing on recent advancements in computational methods, especially in emotion analysis tools for non-English languages, in large language models (LLMs)

and natural language processing (NLP). Our investigation relies on MoresPulse, a refined XLM-RoBERTa model that can identify anger in political text at the sentence level by combining expert-labeled data with artificial samples produced by OpenAI's GPT-4-turbo. With an over-75 % AI-human accuracy rate for anger in Hungarian and German, native speaker expert validation has been used to guarantee the precision and dependability of these models.

This paper advances existing research in three main ways. First, it conceptualises anger as a political resource specifically for newcomer parties who face structural disadvantages in electoral competition and visibility. Second, it links this conceptualisation to the affordances of engagement-driven social media environments, where anger can operate as a temporary digital equaliser by enhancing reach and visibility. Third, it empirically tests how these theoretical expectations play out across two contrasting political systems and two EP election cycles. Together, these objectives allow us to examine not only whether newcomers express more anger, but when and to what extent anger becomes strategically deployed in the run-up to elections, and whether these patterns vary cross-nationally.

2 Anger as a potential political resource

New political parties encounter systemic disadvantages in electoral contests: they have limited financial resources, and lack the media networks that major parties possess (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017; Celis and Erzeel, 2017). This resource asymmetry translates into challenges in agenda-setting and visibility, making it difficult for new actors to compete for votes. Nonetheless, digital platforms open up low-barrier avenues for parties to communicate with citizens (Asimakopoulos et al., 2025; Gibson and Ward, 2009). Their algorithmic framework enhances engagement-oriented material and prioritises emotionally resonant communication above neutral or solely informational communications (O'Brien, 2025). In electoral contexts, emotions can operate as a “digital equaliser”: They partially compensate for the structural disadvantages of newcomers in terms of resources, organisation and legacy media access by boosting visibility and engagement on platforms where content is ranked according to user reactions. When Facebook's algorithm gives more weight to highly charged reactions, such as the “angry” emoji, than to neutral “likes” (Phillips, 2024), emotionally intense posts from relatively small or resource-poor actors may obtain a reach disproportionate to their organisational size. We use the term “equaliser” in this restricted sense of attention and engagement: Emotional appeals can narrow, but not erase, asymmetries in political power or long-term organisational capacity.

Among emotions, anger, indignation, or resentment are powerful sources in political discourse and election campaigns (Gerstlé and Nai, 2019; Miller, 2011; Tolchin, 2018). They have an impact on political activity and are strategically employed by politicians to rally support, criticise opponents, and build dividing narratives (Schnakenberg and Wayne, 2024; Webster, 2021). Understanding their role in political rhetoric is critical for evaluating their influence on electoral strategy and popular mobilisation. Anger is an activating emotion that arises in response to perceived injustice, norm violation, or personal harm, and often motivates corrective or punitive action (Archer and Mills, 2019). Because emotions are episodic by nature, communicators often repeat emotionally charged messages in order to establish and sustain a particular mood (Andersen and Guerrero, 1997). Anger-family emotions encompass related yet distinct affective states, including indignation or moral outrage, anger directed at wrongful actions or breaches of moral standards, and empathic anger elicited by observing harm to others (Hechler and Kessler, 2018). These variations underscore that anger is not a singular entity but a constellation of emotions that differ in focus (self versus other), triggers (harm versus injustice), and political ramifications.

In political settings, anger often manifests as a movement literal or symbolic toward a person, object, or goal, accompanied by an intent to remove perceived obstacles, even if doing so entails symbolic or rhetorical harm to the obstructing agent (Kiss, 2021). Political language expressing irony or sarcasm also often implies underlying anger or aggression (Kaufova and Kaufova, 2019; Grüning and Schubert, 2022). Anger in political discourse is commonly directed at opponents and is often embedded in aggressive or contradictory rhetorical patterns (Beichelt, 2021). A speaker's emotional criticism or attack against another political figure typically signals anger, functioning as a flag for antagonism. Anger blurs into related emotions like resentment and indignation, especially when triggered by perceived injustice or unfair treatment (Feldman, 2023).

When injustices are recognised, anger arises, turning annoyance into political action (Jasper, 1998; Lazarus, 1991). Using their passion to draw attention to pressing concerns, politicians portray themselves as defenders of justice and opponents as roadblocks to advancement. Negative campaigning frequently employs anger, targeting broad issues or specific opponents. Political advertisements often incorporate anger-driven language, making anger one of the most common emotions in campaign communication (Blassnig et al., 2021; Haselmayer, 2019; Russmann et al., 2024; Weber, 2013).

The prevalence of anger in political communication can be interpreted through the lens of the friend-enemy relationship, a concept central to the work of numerous political philosophers, like Carl Schmitt (Greene, 2013; Ost, 2004). Unlike conflicts of interest, which center on resource distribution, moral conflicts

revolve around values that distinguish “virtuous” from “evil” actors (Kusaka, 2017). During election campaigns, such conflicts play a crucial role in defining political boundaries and reinforcing ideological legitimacy while undermining opponents’ credibility (Jung, 2020). Political psychology suggests that as issues become more politicised and contested, conditions typical of election campaigns, moral intuition and gut-level responses tend to shape public persuasion (Valdesolo and Graham, 2016). Furthermore, moral appeals can strengthen the binary framing of politics and black-and-white argumentation (Feinberg and Willer, 2019; Miles, 2016; Prilleltensky, 1994).

Anger is particularly effective in polarising campaign messages, as it simplifies complex issues and reinforces confirmation bias (Grüning and Schubert, 2022; Weeks, 2015). Anger also drives risk-seeking political behaviour, increasing hostility toward opponents and support for radical policies (Hasell and Weeks, 2016). When left unresolved, this emotional intensity can lead to disengagement and cynicism toward the political system (Hetherington and Husser, 2012).

3 The role of emotions in political communication in the EU

Scholars have emphasised the role of emotions in European politics (Moss et al., 2020; Sanchez Salgado, 2021; Stempel and Wenzelburger, 2024; Verbalyte and von Scheve, 2018). The affective turn of European politics has proven particularly useful in establishing the relationship between affectivity and Euroscepticism, low support for the European Union (EU), and voting for Brexit (Clarke et al., 2017; van Spanje and de Vreese, 2011; Verbalyte and von Scheve, 2018). Within this framework, discrete emotions – especially anger – have received significant attention, largely confirming their link to blaming rhetoric and rising extremism: Angry messages make angry citizens who are more likely to attribute responsibility to the EU and to make more extreme voting choices (Garry, 2014; Tilley and Hobolt, 2024).

Beyond its institutional and economic functions, the EU has also been framed as a moral project aimed at overcoming historical animosities between European nations. This moral dimension makes the study of emotions particularly relevant, especially in light of Europe’s multiple crises in recent years, including the financial and migration crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and declining living standards. In such periods of turmoil, both citizens and political elites tend to rely more heavily on emotions and moral intuitions when forming judgements. Crises increase emotional engagement in the public sphere, which elevates the visibility of emotions and makes them a strategic component of political messaging. Anger-related polit-

ical interactions, with the tendency to assign blame, whether directed at national governments or EU institutions, become especially pronounced (Capelos and Katsanidou, 2018; Davou and Demertzis, 2013).

This pattern is particularly evident in the case of newcomer parties. Since outsider candidates often lack institutional resources, emotional appeals – especially anger – offer a powerful tool for attracting media attention and energising their base (Bos and Brants, 2014; Esser et al., 2016). In EP election campaign contexts: The “harsher” campaigns are ‘in character’ for Eurosceptic parties, and are as such more likely to be electorally successful for them” (Nai et al., 2021, p. 21). Recent comparative research on EP campaigns confirms that negativity and dramatisation are central features of parties’ Facebook communication across member states (Russmann et al., 2024), and that angry or emotionally charged posts can be particularly effective in mobilising online engagement for right-wing populist leaders (Gerbaudo et al., 2023). Likewise, Baranowski et al. (2023) show that negative campaigning patterns on parties’ Facebook pages during the 2019 EP elections vary systematically across party families and countries, underlining the importance of examining emotional content in a comparative EP context.

Anger creates the sense of urgency

Anger, by its very nature, is an emotion that demands an action (Silva, 2021). When harnessed strategically, it can propel individuals into political acts, making it an effective emotion in electoral contexts. One key way in which anger drives political behaviour is through its ability to create a sense of urgency (Demertzis, 2013; Dittmar, 2020; Freedon, 2013; Neuman et al., 2007; van Wijk and Fischhendler, 2017). When political leaders frame elections as high-stakes moments of moral or existential importance, anger intensifies the perceived need for action (Badaan et al., 2018; Hoewe and Parrott, 2019). We posit that displays of anger increase in frequency as election day approaches. This is directly connected to the nature of political campaigns, where the intensity of emotional appeals typically escalates in the final stretch (Ridout and Searles, 2011). As campaigns reach their climax, political leaders and parties ramp up their emotional messaging to maximise voter mobilisation.

Anger is typically oppositional

Anger in politics emerges in response to perceived violations of rights, values, or interests, often serving as a rallying force against injustice, making it a powerful

emotional tool for opposition movements (Jasper, 2018; Stürmer and Simon, 2009). Unlike emotions such as hope or pride, which reinforce support for existing structures, anger fuels discontent and encourages political action (Marcus et al., 2000; Valentino et al., 2011).

New parties succeed by strategically navigating the existing political landscape and building robust organisational capacity (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017). Maintaining parliamentary representation is crucial for long-term success, demanding sustained electoral performance (Dinas et al., 2015). Niche parties thrive when mainstream parties fail to address specific concerns, creating opportunities for distinct appeals (Meguid, 2005). In new democracies, party system formation hinges on a party's ability to establish itself amidst evolving political structures (Tavits, 2008). Finally, media visibility significantly impacts support, with anti-immigrant parties often gaining traction through focused media coverage (Vliegenthart et al., 2012).

Newcomer parties – especially those challenging the political establishment – are more likely to use anger in their messaging than established parties. Anger helps them mobilise disillusioned voters, frame elections as a struggle against an unjust system, and distinguish themselves from mainstream competitors. While governing parties tend to emphasise stability and competence, populist challengers often thrive on anger-driven narratives about corruption, inequality, or social exclusion (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

The theoretical literature reviewed above suggests clear expectations about how political newcomers may rely on anger: they lack access to institutional resources and legacy media visibility, yet operate in digital environments where emotional intensity increases algorithmic reach. At the same time, anger is well established as a mobilising emotion that signals injustice and adversarial positioning. These strands of theory jointly motivate a deductive, hypothesis-driven approach, allowing us to test whether observable communication patterns on Facebook in Germany and Hungary reflect these theoretically defined mechanisms. The following hypotheses translate these theoretical insights into empirically testable propositions:

H1: Newcomer parties and politicians are more likely to express anger in their communication than established parties, and the gap widens as the election day approaches.

H2: Newcomer parties and politicians posted more anger-related messages during the 2024 than during the 2019 EP campaign compared to established parties.

H3: Newcomer parties in Hungary use anger-related language more frequently than their counterparts in Germany during EP campaigns.

Anger triggers anger

Political rhetoric frequently leverages anger as an emotional offer, strategically framing issues to elicit feelings of injustice, frustration, or outrage in target audiences (Webster et al., 2022). This intentional evocation of anger serves not merely as a display of emotion, but as a communicative attempt to mobilise support and shape political attitudes. Critically, anger is contagious; its expression can induce reciprocal anger in followers and voters (Grüning and Schubert, 2022). This is increasingly evident in the digital sphere, particularly on platforms like Facebook, where anger-laden political posts frequently generate heightened engagement – not simply agreement, but reciprocal anger expressed through comments, shares, and reactive emotional displays; the latter being the most effectively measurable. Such cycles of emotionally charged content and reactive anger highlight the potential for online platforms to amplify affective polarisation and contribute to increasingly hostile political discourse.

To see whether anger manifestations in social media posts in political discourses result in higher engagement on the followers' side, and whether newcomer political actors perform better in this aspect, we posit the following hypothesis:

H4: Facebook posts that express anger are more likely to induce a higher number of angry reactions in case of newcomer parties and politicians compared to established parties, and this relationship intensifies as the election day approaches.

4 Methodology and measurement

Building on recent advancements in natural language processing (NLP) and large language models (LLMs), our research is confronted with a shortage of effective emotion analysis tools for underrepresented languages. This study utilises MoresPulse, a customised, fine-tuned XLM-RoBERTa model capable of detecting anger at the sentence level in political texts. MoresPulse employs a multilingual fine-tuning strategy: (a) native-speaking political communication experts coded sentence-level emotions using double-blind protocols in each language; (b) all language-specific training sets were cross-translated to create a unified multilingual corpus; (c) a single XLM-RoBERTa model was trained on the combined dataset. This multilingual architecture provides robust performance across languages.

The anger category, which is the focus of our analysis, consists entirely of manually annotated training data. To address class imbalance in other emotion categories (disgust, fear, joy, sadness, pride, enthusiasm), synthetic augmentation using GPT-4-turbo was applied to those underrepresented classes. In a multiclass emotion classifi-

cation architecture, synthetic data in other categories may indirectly influence anger detection through the model's learning of decision boundaries between emotions. Our companion methodological paper (Üveges and Ring, 2025) provides comprehensive linguistic analysis of synthetic data quality and demonstrates minimal performance impact on anger classification from augmentation in other categories.

MoresPulse employs a theory-driven framework grounded in primary emotion theory and appraisal theory, ensuring that classifications align with established psychological and political communication research. The model captures anger manifestations – from direct acknowledgment to figurative expressions and emotive descriptions – enabling detection of subtle semantic cues that conventional dictionary-based methods fail to recognise (Overbeck et al., 2023). Multiple rounds of native-speaker validation were conducted until achieving the 75 % accuracy threshold for anger in each language, with final performance metrics of $F1 = .83$ (Hungarian) and $.84$ (German).

To assess anger expression patterns (H1–H3), we employed generalised linear mixed models (GLMMs) with anger manifestation presence (binary) as the dependent variable, controlling for post length, engagement metrics, election proximity, and actor status. We operationalise “newcomer” status as parties and politicians gaining EP representation for the first time in the focal election. Parties entering the EP in 2019 are classified as newcomers in 2019 but established actors in 2024, reflecting resource asymmetries in party emergence literature (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017; Tavits, 2008).

We employed two complementary analytical approaches. GLMMs with interaction terms served as primary hypothesis tests: newcomer \times days_to_election (H1 temporal dynamics), newcomer \times year (H2 cross-election comparison), and newcomer \times country (H3 cross-national comparison). We supplemented these with Generalised Additive Models (GAMs) for visualisation, constraining smooth terms to $k = 5$ basis functions to prevent overfitting with temporally clustered data. This yielded stable, effective degrees of freedom (3–4) and narrow confidence intervals. All hypothesis adjudications rely on GLMM coefficients; GAM figures provide illustrations (see Appendix A for Hungary 2019, Appendix B for Hungary 2024, Appendix C for Germany 2019, Appendix D for Germany 2024, Appendix E for Hungary 2019–2024 comparison, Appendix F for Germany 2019–2024 comparison, Appendix G for Hungary-Germany comparison).

To test H4 (audience response), we employed negative binomial GAMs. Model 1 examined all posts ($N_{\text{Hungary}} = 26,811$; $N_{\text{Germany}} = 24,829$): angry_reactions \sim anger manifestation \times newcomer \times days_scaled + controls + s(user_name, bs=“re”). Model 2 examined only anger posts ($N_{\text{Hungary}} = 8,248$; $N_{\text{Germany}} = 3,220$): angry_reactions \sim newcomer \times days_scaled + controls + s(user_name, bs=“re”), testing whether newcomers gain reaction advantages over time (see Appendices H and I for Hungary, and Appendices J and K for Germany).

Data and sampling

As described above, this analysis focuses on two countries, Germany and Hungary, and samples German and Hungarian politicians' and parties' Facebook messages and user engagement metrics. We analyse parties and individual politicians together rather than separately for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, party and politician Facebook pages function as components of coordinated communication strategies. What matters for our research question is whether the political actor – represented through party or personal pages – holds newcomer or established status. Empirically, communication patterns vary across contexts regarding whether politicians use primarily party or personal pages. Separating these would introduce artificial imbalance reflecting platform usage norms rather than substantive differences. Text similarity analyses comparing party versus politician pages (where both were available) revealed no significant systematic differences in anger usage patterns, supporting their combined analysis. This approach aligns with established practices in social media research (Nai et al., 2021; Russmann et al., 2024).

We included all Facebook posts ten weeks before the 2019 and 2024 European Parliamentary elections, but only those parties and politicians that entered the European Parliament as the result of the election. This decision reflects the comparative aim of the study. We focus on established and newcomer actors within the set of politically relevant competitors. Actors who did not win representation typically have very limited impact on European politics which makes them analytically less relevant for examining how anger is deployed as a campaign resource among viable competitors. Regarding the ten-week observation window, our aim to extend the data collection beyond the more common maximum four-week pre-election period used in EP campaign research (see Haßler et al., 2021; Marchal et al., 2021; Fenoll, 2022) was driven by methodological considerations: A longer interval allows for a larger and more stable sample, increases variance in emotional expression, and offers a more reliable basis for modelling temporal dynamics in anger-related communication. In European Parliamentary election campaigns, parties and their leading candidates communicate in highly coordinated ways. This coordination is well documented in the political communication literature: Parties curate a coherent message architecture, and the most visible politicians act as its principal carriers. Especially during EP campaigns, party headquarters typically centralise communication strategy, issue prioritisation, and emotional tone.

We emphasise that for voters and Facebook users, party pages and the Facebook pages of top politicians serve as *two channels of the same communication apparatus*. They very likely share the same campaign messages, deploy the same emotional registers, react to the same events using consistent framing, and are

intended to reinforce one another. Thus, combining them reflects the reality of how political communication is produced, and therefore, they will be evaluated together throughout the study. Parties and politicians are listed in the table below:

Table 1: List of sampled parties and politicians.

2019			
Parties			
Hungary		Germany	
Newcomer	Established	Newcomer	Established
Demokratikus Koalíció (DK)	Fidesz-KDNP	Volt Deutschland	CDU
Momentum	Magyar Szocialista Párt Jobbik	AfD Die PARTEI Familien-Partei Deutschlands PARTEI MENSCH UMWELT TIERSCHUTZ	CSU SPD Bündnis 90/Die Grünen DIE LINKE FDP
Politicians			
Hungary		Germany	
Newcomer	Established	Newcomer	Established
Cseh Katalin Dobrev Klára	Trócsányi László Dr. Tóth Bertalan Gyöngyösi Márton	Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen Martin Sonneborn Damian Boeselager	Katarina Barley Ska Keller Klaus Buchner Martin Schirdewan Nicola Beer Ulrike Müller Helmut Gueking Martin Buschmann Patrick Breyer
2024			
Parties			
Hungary		Germany	
Newcomer	Established	Newcomer	Established
TISZA Tisztelet és Szabadság Párt Mi Hazánk Mozgalom	Fidesz Demokratikus Koalíció		CDU CSU

Table 1: (continued)

2024			
Parties			
Hungary		Germany	
Newcomer	Established	Newcomer	Established
			SPD Bündnis 90/Die Grünen DIE LINKE FDP AfD
Politicians			
Hungary		Germany	
Newcomer	Established	Newcomer	Established
Péter Magyar	Deutsch Tamás Dobrev Klára	Sahra Wagenknecht	

Analytical strategy and model specification

Given the data's structure – multiple sentences nested within posts and posts attributed to specific political actors (parties or politicians) – we modelled anger as a binary outcome, indicating whether a sentence was classified as expressing anger (1) or not (0) based on prior emotion annotation.

We estimated a series of generalised linear mixed models (GLMMs) with a binomial distribution and logit link, including a random intercept to account for unobserved heterogeneity at the actor level. The key independent variables were whether the party or politician can be considered as newcomer (binary: 1 = newcomer, 0 = established), the number of days until the election (standardised), and the interaction of these two variables. We included the length of the post (the number of words it includes, standardised) and the day of the week of posting (factor) as control variables.

We opted for GLMMs to properly model the dependent variable's binary nature and account for clustered observations within communicators. This approach enables valid inference while acknowledging repeated measures. The interaction between newcomer status and time allows a direct test of the hypothesised divergence in anger expression over the campaign. Including GAMs further allowed

us to relax the assumption of linearity, checking whether the dynamics of anger expression followed more complex temporal patterns. The smooth terms for time by the newcomer group were highly significant, confirming nonlinear divergence trends. These results reinforce and nuance the findings of the GLMMs. To prevent overfitting in contexts with temporally clustered data, we constrained GAM smooth terms to five basis functions ($k = 5$) rather than default settings ($k = 10$), yielding stable effective degrees of freedom (3–4 across all models) and narrow confidence intervals suitable for visualisation.

To ensure robustness, we:

- restricted the data to multi-sentence posts to reduce noise from very short entries,
- re-estimated the model with a log-transformed time variable to account for nonlinearity,
- and tested a generalised additive model (GAM) using `mgcv:gam` in R, allowing for smooth, non-parametric effects of time separately for newcomer and established actors.

Taken together, these robustness checks provide compelling evidence that the observed interaction is not an artefact of a particular modelling choice or data subset. Instead, it reflects a meaningful and systematic pattern in the strategic use of emotional rhetoric by newcomer political actors.

5 Comparative analysis of anger expressions by party type in the 2019 and 2024 European Parliamentary election campaigns

This section presents the key findings of the analysis. The main results are presented in the text, with Figures 1 to 4 illustrating the findings related to Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, and Figure 5 displaying the results for Hypothesis 4; detailed tables with the full results are available in the Appendices A-K.

First, we tested the hypothesis (H1) that newcomer parties and politicians are more likely to express anger in their communication than established actors, and that this gap widens as the election day approaches. We employed Generalised Linear Mixed-Effects Models (GLMMs) with linear interaction terms as our primary hypothesis tests, providing robust coefficient estimates suitable for contexts with temporal clustering. Generalized Additive Models (GAMs) supplemented these analyses by visualising temporal patterns; to prevent overfitting with sparse

data, we constrained smooth terms to $k = 5$ basis functions, yielding stable confidence intervals across all contexts. The empirical findings reveal a complex and context-dependent pattern that provides only partial support for the hypothesis. The evidence varies significantly across different electoral contexts, suggesting that the relationship between newcomer status and anger expression is more nuanced than initially theorised. Importantly, across all contexts, there was no consistent main effect for newcomer status on anger expression, with coefficients varying in direction and remaining statistically non-significant. This suggests that the baseline difference in anger expression between newcomers and established parties is not systematic, and the key dynamics lie in how these patterns evolve temporally.

For Germany, the results show contrasting patterns between the two election cycles. In 2019, the interaction term between newcomer status and proximity to election day was statistically significant but negative (-0.193 , $p = .009$), indicating that the gap between newcomers and established parties actually narrowed as election day approached – contrary to the hypothesis. GAM visualisation confirms this pattern with stable confidence bands reflecting robust estimation. However, in 2024, there was marginal evidence supporting the hypothesis, with a positive interaction coefficient (0.321 , $p = .056$) suggesting that newcomers may have intensified their anger expression relative to established parties as the election approached.

The Hungarian cases provide the most dramatic illustration of contextual variation. The 2019 data showed robust support for the hypothesis, with a highly significant positive interaction term ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < .001$), indicating that newcomers increasingly expressed more anger than established parties as election day approached. GAM visualisation illustrates this as diverging upward trajectories with narrow confidence intervals, reflecting the anger-based mobilisation strategies of 2019 challengers such as Jobbik and Momentum. However, in the 2024 Hungarian election this pattern was completely reversed, showing a strong negative interaction effect ($\beta = -0.279$, $p < .001$), meaning that established parties intensified their anger expression while newcomers maintained relative stability. GAM visualisation confirms this strategic reversal with stable confidence bands, demonstrating that established actors adopted the anger-intensive tactics pioneered by 2019 newcomers.

The hypothesis receives partial and context-dependent validation. Hungary 2019 provides the clearest empirical support, with newcomers demonstrating significantly steeper anger intensification than established parties, consistent with the theoretical expectation that resource-constrained challengers leverage emotional mobilisation strategies. However, this pattern proved neither universal nor temporally stable. By 2024, the Hungarian context exhibited a complete strategic reversal, with established parties – particularly Fidesz responding to Magyar Péter's emergence – adopting the anger-intensive tactics initially pioneered by newcomers. This

reversal demonstrates that anger operates as a diffusible strategic resource rather than a fixed newcomer characteristic, with established parties rapidly learning and adapting challenger innovations in highly polarised environments.

The German data reveal different dynamics shaped by lower polarisation levels. In 2019, established parties intensified anger expression more than newcomers, suggesting that experienced actors maintain strategic communication advantages in less confrontational electoral environments. The 2024 German data show a trend toward newcomer intensification, though this effect remains marginally significant and warrants cautious interpretation. Rather than representing a consistent behavioural difference between party types, anger expression appears to be a dynamic strategic resource whose deployment reflects learning, adaptation, and contextual polarisation levels. The findings suggest that the strategic use of anger in political communication is influenced by broader contextual factors – including polarisation intensity, competitive dynamics, and evolving communication norms – that vary across countries and election cycles.

For H2 – the hypothesis that newcomer political actors expressed anger more frequently during the 2024 EP campaign than in 2019, especially relative to established actors – the analysis does not provide support. While individual-year models show some directional changes, the pooled models reveal a different picture. For Germany, the interaction term *newcomer x year2024* is -0.592 ($p = .020$), indicating that newcomers actually decreased their relative anger expression in 2024 compared to 2019. For Hungary, the interaction term is -0.129 ($p = .768$), showing no significant change. These pooled models provide evidence against H2. The findings suggest that rather than newcomers increasing their anger expression relative to established parties in 2024, the overall landscape of political anger may have shifted, with established parties potentially adapting their communication strategies.

We examined cross-national differences (H3) in anger expression patterns between Hungary and Germany. The analysis strongly supports the hypothesis of country-specific differences. Direct cross-country comparison among newcomer parties shows that Hungarian newcomers express significantly more anger than their German counterparts ($b = 0.943$, $p = .007$). This substantial effect indicates that political culture and electoral context significantly influence emotional communication strategies.

The data for Hungary show more pronounced temporal dynamics, with significant interaction effects between newcomer status and time in both 2019 ($b = 0.231$, $p < .001$) and 2024 ($b = -0.279$, $p < .001$), though in opposite directions. This suggests that Hungarian political communication exhibits more volatile emotional dynamics across election cycles.

The data for Germany demonstrate more stable but varied patterns, with a significant negative interaction in 2019 ($b = -0.193, p = .009$) and a marginally significant positive interaction in 2024 ($b = 0.321, p = .056$). German political discourse appears to show more gradual shifts in emotional campaigning strategies.

The cross-national difference is further evidenced by the baseline anger levels: Hungarian newcomers consistently operate in a more emotionally charged communication environment, while German newcomers show more restrained emotional expression patterns. This suggests that national political cultures fundamentally shape how challenger parties deploy emotional rhetoric as a strategic resource.

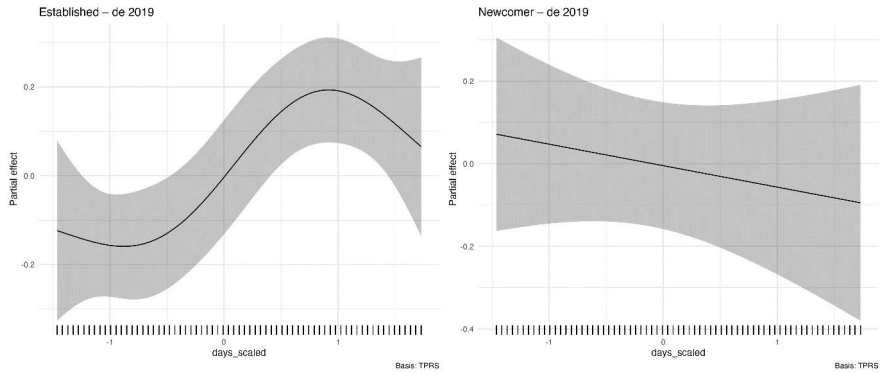


Figure 1: The expression of anger in the Facebook posts of newcomer and established parties in Germany during the 2019 EP campaign. Authors' compilation.

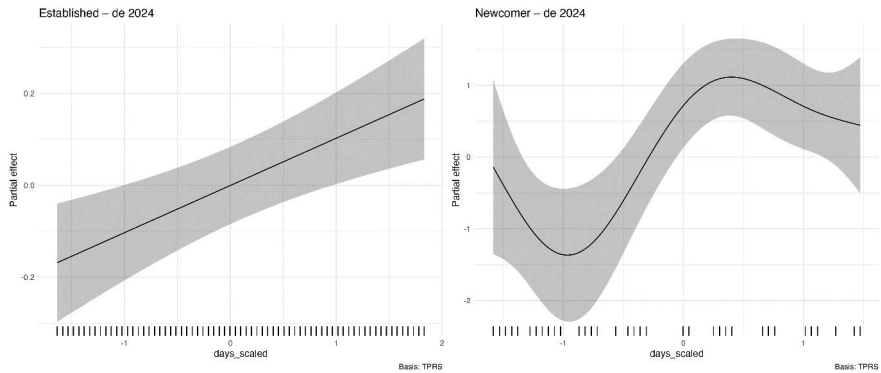


Figure 2: The expression of anger in the Facebook posts of newcomer and established parties in Germany during the 2024 EP campaign. Authors' compilation.

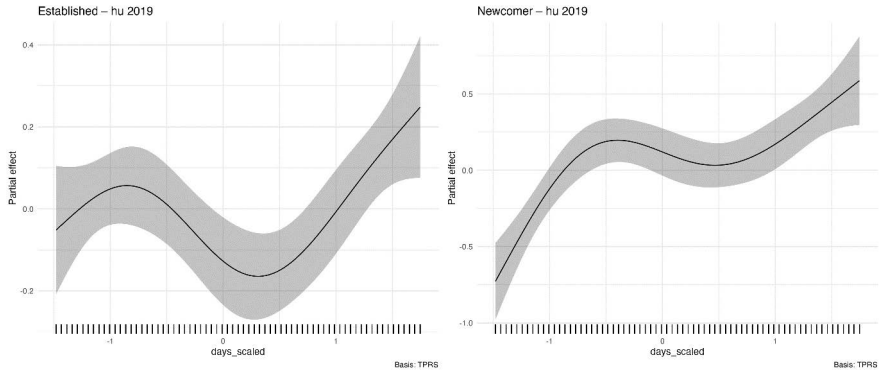


Figure 3: The expression of anger in the Facebook posts of newcomer and established parties in Hungary during the 2019 EP campaign. Authors' compilation.

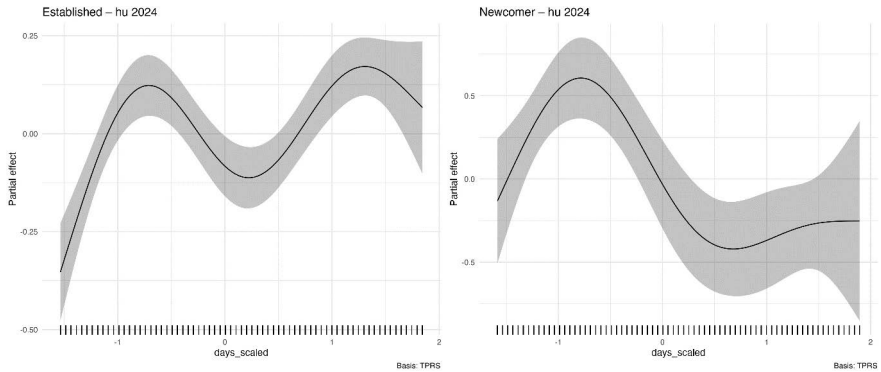


Figure 4: The expression of anger in the Facebook posts of newcomer and established parties in Hungary during the 2024 EP campaign (Y axis scales not standardised for easier visibility). Authors' compilation.

Finally, to test hypothesis 4 – whether anger-laden posts generate more angry reactions, with stronger effects for newcomers that intensify over time – we employed two complementary modeling strategies. Figure 5 displays the descriptive patterns, while formal negative binomial GAMs provide statistical tests of these dynamics.

The statistical models reveal striking country-specific patterns. The first set of models tested whether the presence of anger manifestation increases angry reactions across all posts using three-way interactions (anger \times newcomer \times time to election), controlling for post length, day of the week, and random effects for political actors.

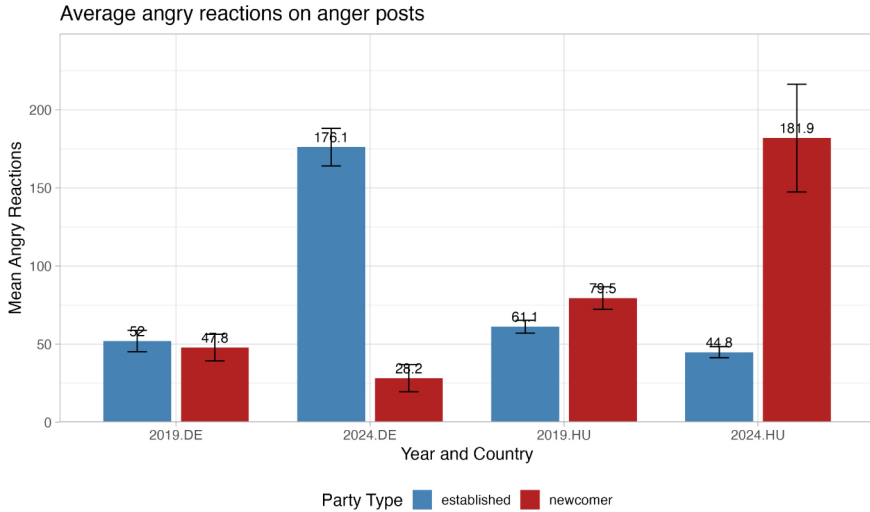


Figure 5: Average angry reactions on anger-laden Facebook posts during the 2019 and 2024 EP campaigns in Hungary and Germany. Authors' compilation.

The Hungarian model ($N = 26,811$ posts) reveals that anger-laden posts receive 109 % more angry reactions than non-anger posts ($\exp(0.737) = 2.09$, $p < .001$), and newcomers generate 100 % more reactions overall ($\exp(0.691) = 2.00$, $p < .001$). Critically, the anger \times newcomer interaction demonstrates that anger is significantly more effective for newcomers at baseline ($\exp(0.238) = 1.27$, $p = .005$), supporting H4's prediction of newcomer advantage in anger-based mobilisation.

However, the three-way interaction (anger \times newcomer \times days to election: $b = -0.487$, $p < .001$) reveals complex temporal dynamics. While newcomers initially leverage anger more effectively than established parties, this advantage erodes substantially as election day approaches (39 % reduction). This pattern, visible in Figure 5 as the sustained four-fold advantage newcomers maintain across both election cycles, suggests that established parties in highly confrontational political contexts adapt by intensifying their own anger-based messaging, partially neutralising newcomers' strategic advantage.

The German model ($N = 24,829$ posts) shows that anger posts receive 69 % more reactions ($\exp(0.522) = 1.69$, $p < .001$), and newcomers generate 41 % more reactions overall ($\exp(0.344) = 1.41$, $p < .001$). Notably, the anger \times newcomer interaction is negative and significant ($\exp(-0.315) = 0.73$, $p = .016$), indicating that anger is initially less effective for newcomers than established parties – contrary to H4's prediction and consistent with Figure 5's pattern showing established parties receiving more angry reactions.

The three-way interaction in Germany is non-significant ($p = .66$), suggesting stable dynamics at the aggregate level. However, a second set of models examining only anger-laden posts reveals a different temporal pattern: While German newcomers show no significant baseline advantage ($p = .25$), the newcomer \times time interaction is strongly positive ($\exp(0.556) = 1.74$, $p < .001$). This indicates that German newcomers develop substantial advantages in anger-based engagement as campaigns intensify – a 74% increase in effectiveness from campaign start to election day. This learning curve pattern helps explain why Figure 5 shows established parties' advantage intensifying in Germany: Newcomers are catching up within campaigns, but established parties remain dominant.

These formal models provide partial support for H4 while revealing critical contextual contingencies. In Hungary, anger serves as an immediately effective mobilisation tool for newcomers, but established parties rapidly adapt their emotional strategies. In Germany, newcomers initially struggle to leverage anger effectively but develop this capability over time, suggesting that emotional campaign strategies require experiential learning in less confrontational political environments.

While the current analysis examines changes between election years (2019 versus 2024) rather than proximity to election day within individual campaigns, the temporal intensification observed – particularly the dramatic shifts in both countries – suggests that anger-based engagement strategies are evolving rapidly. The observed patterns may reflect that both political actors and their followers are increasingly learning how Facebook functions and algorithms operate, allowing for more targeted and emotionally resonant content creation and engagement.

A closer examination of the temporal dynamics across the two election cycles reveals that the patterns observed for Hungary and Germany diverge in important ways. In Hungary, the 2019 campaign was characterised by a pronounced newcomer advantage: Newcomers intensified their anger expression as election day approached, while established parties remained comparatively stable. However, by 2024 this pattern had reversed, with established actors adopting or even surpassing the anger-laden communication styles that had previously distinguished newcomers. This suggests a rapid diffusion of emotional campaign tactics within Hungary's increasingly polarised environment. In Germany, by contrast, anger expression followed a more gradual trajectory. In 2019, established parties intensively used anger more markedly than newcomers, whereas the 2024 results show a modest shift, with newcomers beginning to use anger more strategically, although overall anger levels remained lower than in Hungary. These contrasting dynamics highlight how emotional campaigning is shaped not only by electoral time but also by national political cultures: Hungary's confrontational political environment appears to accelerate the uptake of anger-based strategies, while Germany's consensual, coalition-driven political environment constrains the extent and pace of such developments.

6 Conclusion

This research has demonstrated the evolving and complex relationship between newcomer status in online political spaces during EP campaigns, the expression of emotions – particularly anger – and subsequent engagement with political content. While prior scholarship has examined emotional mobilisation in campaigns (Bos and Brants, 2014; Haselmayer, 2019) and the algorithmic amplification of affective content (Klinger and Svensson, 2025), few studies have explicitly linked these insights to the structural disadvantages faced by newcomer political actors.

Moving beyond simplistic assumptions about the homogenising effect of online platforms, our findings reveal a dynamic interplay of factors influencing how emotions are strategically deployed and received within digital political environments. However, the observed effects are not universal, highlighting the critical importance of considering contextual factors, specifically national political cultures and temporal changes in online behaviour.

Two findings emerge consistently across models, election years, and countries. First, Hungarian newcomers operate in a more anger-saturated environment than their German counterparts, a difference clearly visible in the trajectories displayed in Figures 3 and 4. This indicates a structurally more emotionalised and polarised communication context in Hungary. Second, newcomer status alone does not generate a systematic baseline difference in anger expression: The main effects for newcomer status are small and statistically non-significant across most models. This suggests that anger is not universally or inherently more typical of newcomers once time, actor-level variation, and post characteristics are taken into account. These robust findings underline that national political cultures shape anger expression more strongly than party age or institutional status *per se*.

Other findings are more nuanced and vary significantly across contexts. The temporal interaction between newcomer status and proximity to election day (central to H1) shows divergent slopes across Figures 1–4, indicating that the intensification or reduction of anger over time is highly contingent. In Hungary 2019 (Figure 3), newcomers increasingly expressed anger as election day approached, whereas in Hungary 2024 (Figure 4) this pattern reversed, with established parties intensifying anger expression while newcomers remained relatively stable, demonstrating strategic adaptation by established actors. Germany exhibits the opposite temporal pattern: A narrowing gap in 2019 (Figure 1) and a marginally widening gap in 2024 (Figure 2). These mixed effects caution against assuming a stable newcomer strategy and instead highlight the sensitivity of emotional campaigning to shifting political conditions.

Similarly, H2, predicting higher anger expression among newcomers in 2024 compared to 2019, receives no support. For Hungary, the newcomer-established gap

remained statistically unchanged across election cycles. For Germany, the interaction was significant but in the opposite direction: Newcomers actually decreased their relative anger use in 2024 compared to 2019, while established parties maintained or slightly increased theirs. This suggests that anger does not increase linearly across electoral cycles and that established parties may also adjust their emotional strategies over time.

Engagement patterns in H4 further underscore contextual variation. In Hungary, newcomer parties consistently generated substantially more angry reactions than established parties, with this gap widening across cycles (Figure 5). In Germany, the opposite pattern holds: Established parties received more angry reactions, and their advantage intensified. These findings show that anger's mobilising potential depends strongly on the political environment in which messages circulate.

Taken together, the mixed findings reveal that anger operates as a strategic resource particularly in volatile, polarised systems and that its deployment changes over time.

Beyond these empirical patterns, we propose several interpretive, rather speculative, conclusions which should be treated as hypotheses for future research. One possibility is adaptation: Established actors may increasingly appropriate anger-laden frames, thereby reducing the distinctiveness of newcomers. Another potential mechanism is audience habituation: As anger becomes more pervasive in online spaces, its novelty and engagement potential may diminish. A related hypothesis is actor and audience learning, whereby communicators become more adept at crafting emotional appeals while followers adjust their reactions to platform affordances. While these interpretations are consistent with the declining engagement advantage for newcomers between 2019 and 2024, they cannot be directly tested with the current data and must remain conjectural.

The pronounced divergence between Germany and Hungary emphasises the need to embed analyses of online emotional communication within broader socio-political contexts. In Hungary's antagonistic system anger appears to be an effective engagement strategy for both opposition and government actors. In contrast, Germany's more consensual, coalition-oriented political system, reinforced by federal institutional structures and norms of moderation, constrains the political resonance of anger. Here, anger is less likely to generate broad support and more likely to be perceived as disruptive.

Newcomers appear to leverage emotionally charged language as a shortcut to attract attention and engagement. Yet this strategy is not sustainable. The comparison between 2019 and 2024 illustrates that the relative advantage of newcomer anger dissipates over time, either because established actors adopt similar tactics or because audiences become less responsive to emotional intensity. Anger has

thus shifted from being a distinctive resource of newcomers to an increasingly widespread feature of European Parliamentary campaigning.

This convergence aligns with broader research on negative tonality in EP elections (Kazlauskaitė and Salmela, 2021; Maier et al., 2024) and suggests that anger has become part of the shared communicative repertoire of political actors. The broader democratic implications remain ambiguous: Anger-driven campaigning may entrench adversarial politics by reinforcing moralised divisions, yet it could also signal grievances that require recognition and responsive governance.

Future work should pursue longer-term, multi-cycle analyses to trace the evolution of emotional campaigning over time, as well as broader cross-national studies that more fully capture the cultural and institutional determinants of emotional expression. Further research should examine how emotional appeals intersect with disinformation, propaganda, and other manipulative strategies online, given that affectively charged content often amplifies the reach and credibility of misleading information.

Data availability: https://osf.io/5cgbw/?view_only=6cc7641f982743e0a597d58c3574496c

Funding: This project was funded by MORES (Moral Emotions in Politics. How they Divide, how they Unite) which received funding from the European Union under grant agreement No 101132601. However, views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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Supplemental Material: This article contains supplementary material (<https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2025-0128>).