MORES

MORAL EMOTIONS IN POLITICS

MORES Survey Tool

Measuring Emotional Responses to Public Policies

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TOOLS



MORAL EMOTIONS IN POLITICS: HOW THEY UNITE, HOW THEY DIVIDE

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Measuring Emotional Responses to Policies



This survey tool is evidence-based and tailored to policymakers, civil society organisations, and public administrators

" Before asking whether citizens support a policy, ask how it makes them feel "

Diana Ekzarova
MORES researcher,
European University Institute,
Florence

The MORES Survey Tool offers a practical framework for adding an emotional dimension to the assessment of public policy responses and citizens' perceptions. It is designed for policymakers, civil society organisations, public administrations, and those interested in uncovering how policies evoke emotions, such as fear, anxiety, compassion, hope, anger, frustration, and others.

The tool can be used before a policy is adopted, to gauge likely support and emotional reactions; once a policy is in place, to understand which emotions drive support or opposition; and before a policy is communicated, to test how different emotional framings affect support. It consists of four modules: a core questionnaire on emotional responses (Module A), which can be used on its own; a framing experiment (Module B); a measure of emotional intensity (Module C); and background questions (Module D). All modules can be run online, for example with standard survey software.

The tool is based on the research and methodological approaches designed and published within and beyond the MORES project, including a crowdsourcing study of 1,363 responses on five EU policy areas and a survey experiment with more than 4,000 respondents in Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. It complements MORES Pulse, which detects emotions in political texts. The document consists of two parts: the practical description of the tool and a theoretical justification.

Part I. Practical Manual



Depending on the policy question, emotional responses can be examined in diverse ways. Therefore, the following approaches can be used separately or in combination

" Knowing which emotions a policy stirs, and how strongly, helps policymakers explain it better "

Claudio Radaelli
MORES co-investigator,
European University Institute,
Florence

1. Measuring Emotional Response

A policy may be supported or opposed based on citizens' emotional perceptions. One way to comprehend it is to ask respondents to evaluate the policy and identify the specific emotions they feel about the problem and the proposed solution.

This approach is useful when the main question is "How do citizens perceive this policy and how does it make them feel?", which helps interpret these emotions in terms of support, effectiveness, and perceptions of institutions and stakeholders.

2. Testing Emotional Framing

Another way of assessing policy support is to consider emotional framing; in other words, how the policy is communicated. To examine this, respondents may be exposed to different versions of the same policy information, keeping the core facts identical and diversifying the emotional framing. For instance, one can choose to emphasise hope, fear, empathy, or compassion, or keep the narrative neutral, without emotional content.

This approach is useful when the main question is "Does the way a policy is presented affect citizens' attitudes, and if so, how?"

3. Assessing Emotional Intensity

Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, understanding and identifying the set of emotions may not be enough. Some policies may require awareness of the intensity of emotions induced. Thus, respondents may be asked to rate this intensity on a scale with a continuous slider button.

This approach is useful when the main question is "How strongly do citizens emotionally perceive the policy?"

Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire is organised into three modules, one for each of the approaches described above, plus a module of background questions (Module D). Module A is the core one and can be used on its own. Modules B and C reuse some of its questions and add the elements needed for specific purposes. The modules can be combined, and every survey should end with the background questions (Module D) on socio-demographic characteristics and, optionally, political orientation. Unless stated otherwise, respondents should first receive a brief and neutral description of the policy.

Module A: Measuring Emotional Response (Core Module)

The choice of the emotional set should depend on the policy proposal and the problem policymakers aim to address. A general set includes fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, hope, pride, and compassion. Other

	QUESTION	SET OF ANSWERS	INTERPRETATION
1	How familiar were you with this policy?	1 = Not at all familiar → 7 = Very familiar.	Measures prior familiarity.
2	How important do you consider the problem that the policy is intended to address?	1 = Not at all important → 7 = Extremely important.	Distinguishes perceptions of the problem from the proposed solution.
3	To what extent do you support the policy?	1 = Strongly oppose → 7 = Strongly support.	Measures the policy attitude.
4	To what extent do you think the selected institution is the appropriate actor to address the given problem?	1 = Not at all appropriate → 7 = Completely appropriate.	Measures legitimacy of the initiating actor.
5	How effective do you expect the policy to be in solving the problem?	1 = Not at all effective → 7 = Very effective.	Measures expected policy effectiveness.
6	Thinking about this policy, how strongly do you feel each of the following emotions?	1 = Not at all → 7 = Extremely. Slider on the suggested battery: worried/afraid; angry; frustrated; hopeful; proud; compassionate.	The exact emotions can be adapted to the policy area.
7	Which of these emotions best describes your main reaction to, or perception of, this policy?	Worried/afraid; angry; frustrated; hopeful; proud; compassionate; none of the above; other (please specify).	Identifies the dominant self-reported emotional response.
8	(Optional question) What is the main reason you feel this way?	Open answer.	Allows respondents to reflect on self-identified emotions and share more about something that was not captured in previous questions.

emotions, such as enthusiasm, disappointment, satisfaction, relief, resentment, and disgust, may be added where relevant. However, it is suggested to keep the set reasonably concise and focused.

Module B: Testing Emotional Framing

This module is a survey experiment. Instead of one policy description, it requires several versions of the same policy message (vignettes) that differ solely in their emotional framing. The first step is to write a short text per framing. The facts (what the policy does, who is affected, and what the costs are) must be identical in all versions; only the emotional tone changes across the vignettes, for instance, empathy/compassion, fear, or anger. A neutral version should be included for the control group. All versions should keep a similar length and structure. The second step is to randomise the vignettes, so that each participant receives and reads only one vignette and then answers the questions in the table below. Random assignment is the key principle of the survey experiment, an approach that allows for measuring the difference between the groups.

The next step is measuring outcomes. After reading the vignette, all respondents answer the same set of questions:

	QUESTION	SET OF ANSWERS	INTERPRETATION
1	How did the text you have just read make you feel?	1 = Not at all → 7 = Extremely. For each emotion used in the vignettes (e.g. hopeful, compassionate, afraid, angry, etc.).	Checks that each version evoked the intended emotion.
2	To what extent do you support the policy?	1 = Strongly oppose → 7 = Strongly support.	Measures the effect of the framing on general support.
3	To what extent do you support each of the following measures?	1 = Strongly oppose → 7 = Strongly support, for each measure (2–4 concrete instruments of policy).	Framing can affect general support and support for specific instruments differently.
4	How effective do you expect the policy to be in solving the addressed issue/problem?	1 = Not at all effective → 7 = Very effective.	Measures the framing effect on expected effectiveness.
5	How do you feel about the group affected by the policy?	1 = Not at all → 7 = Extremely. For each emotion used in the vignettes (e.g. hopeful, compassionate, afraid, angry, etc.).	Shows whether the framing changes how respondents feel about the affected group, not only about the policy.

Finally, to analyse the results, compare the average responses to the emotional version with those to the neutral version. A difference will show the effect of that framing on attitudes.

Module C: Assessing Emotional Intensity

In online surveys, this module can replace Q6 of Module A, as a continuous slider ranging from 0 to 10 gives a finer measure of intensity than a 7-point scale.

	QUESTION	SET OF ANSWERS	INTERPRETATION
1	Thinking about this policy, how strongly do you feel each of the following emotions? Please move the slider.	Slider from 0 = Not at all to 10 = Extremely, one per emotion, starting at the midpoint; items in random order. • Enthusiasm: enthusiastic, hopeful, proud. • Anxiety: scared, worried, afraid. • Aversion: hateful, angry, bitter, resentful.	Average the items of each group to obtain three scores (0–10): enthusiasm, anxiety, and aversion. The highest score shows the main emotional tone; its level shows how strongly it is felt.
2	Overall, how strongly do you feel about this policy?	Slider from 0 = Not at all strongly to 10 = Very strongly	Measures overall intensity, regardless of the type of emotion.

Module D: Background Questions (All Modules)

	QUESTION	SET OF ANSWERS	INTERPRETATION
1	Socio-demographic questions	Age, gender, country/region, education, income, etc.	Controls for these factors, which might have an effect on policy support.
2	(Optional) In politics, people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Where would you place yourself?	0 = Left → 10 = Right.	

Interpretation of the Results and Limitations

Specific emotions may highlight different perceptions and hence different actions to respond. Their meaning, however, always relies on the context. For instance, policies involving risk or uncertainty may require greater attention to fear and anxiety, while policies over questions of justice and responsibility may trigger anger or resentment. Policies associated with the future may call for hope and enthusiasm, while policies affecting vulnerable groups may stimulate empathy and compassion.

The following interpretations offer a lens for possible explanations; however, they should not be read as fixed rules. For this reason, emotional responses, as an additional layer to policy assessment, should be interpreted alongside other measured attitudes, such as support or opposition, assessments of effectiveness, and perceptions of policy actors and institutions.

EMOTION	POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION (MAY INDICATE...)
Fear/ Anxiety	Perceived threat, risk, or uncertainty. May be associated with caution, avoidance, or greater attention to information.
Anger/ Aversion	Perceived injustice or irresponsibility. May be associated with opposition or confrontation.
Frustration	Ineffective implementation or unmet expectations. May be associated with opposition or unwillingness to act.
Hope	Expectation of a positive outcome. May encourage engagement.
Pride	Sense of achievement or collective accomplishment. May be linked to stronger attachment and support.
Compassion	Concern for vulnerable or negatively affected groups of people.
Relief	Reduced perception of threat and uncertainty.
Enthusiasm	Positive engagement and willingness to support or participate.

The tool can identify emotions within the context of public policies; however, it cannot establish causal relationships, unless the survey experiment design is used (Module B). The main limitation of these approaches lies in participants' self-reported answers. Respondents may not be aware of what they feel, may struggle to name an emotion, or may give the answers they think are expected. This tool draws on one source of evidence. Its findings are best checked against other sources, such as behavioural data, interviews, and focus groups. Still, the tool supplies an emotional framework that is often missing in policy assessments.

Part II. Justification and Methodological Background

This part extends and explains the above-described approaches and proposals, based on research and papers carried out and published within the MORES project and beyond

As we are adding an emotional dimension to understanding citizens' perceptions of public policy, it is important to understand how to interpret, distinguish, and use these emotions to address public issues effectively. Emotion is a complex reaction, which cannot be reduced to simply negative or positive affect. Research in political psychology and psychology has shown that emotions may involve different appraisals and behavioural tendencies (Roseman & Smith, 2001).

Appraisal theory of emotions helps one understand why the same policy can evoke fear in one person, anger in another, and hope in a third. It holds that emotions emerge from people's subjective appraisal of a situation, not from the situation itself. These appraisals are also connected with different action tendencies. Fear and anxiety are linked to caution or a need to seek more information; anger is associated with blame and confrontation (Frijda, 1986). In public policy, this means that emotional responses are most informative when interpreted together with the object of the emotion (the policy itself, responsible institutions, groups addressed, etc.), the appraisal underlying it, and the broader evaluation of the policy. This perspective informs the outputs through asking about the set of emotions measured in the survey, which might vary across policy areas. For this reason, the tool proposes an adaptable set of emotions rather than a fixed one.

This leads us to the empirical work conducted within the MORES project. A crowdsourcing study on EU policies gathered 1,363 responses concerning five policy domains: war in Ukraine, migration and asylum, climate policy, fiscal coordination, and food safety (Triacca et al., 2026). The study combined questions about respondents':

1. familiarity with the policy;

2. assessment of its appropriateness or effectiveness;
3. specific emotional reactions;
4. reasoning and perceptions expressed through open-ended responses.

Importantly, the study captured specific emotional reactions instead of simply assessing positive or negative feelings. The emotions varied across policy fields and included, among others, fear, pride, frustration, compassion, anger, enthusiasm, satisfaction, disappointment, and relief.

Another MORES study focused on the emotional framing of a policy problem and its related regulation. This study, a survey experiment, randomly exposed more than 4,000 respondents in Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland to different versions of the same underlying story about an asylum seeker (Gorczeski & Boda, 2026; Kamkhaji et al., 2026). The factual content remained comparable, while the framing emphasised hope, empathy, fear, anger, or used a neutral formulation. The study then examined whether these different frames affected support for specific asylum-policy instruments, broader preferences on migration policy, and attitudes towards migrants.

The results showed how emotional framing can affect migration policy support, depending on the policy question: "the emotional narratives anchored in hope and empathy increased support for a more open stance. Fear and anger produced no comparable effect" (Gorczeski & Boda, 2026). However, when respondents were asked to evaluate specific instruments (Dublin, Eurodac, and burden-sharing), anger, fear, and, unexpectedly, empathy reduced support. Factual neutral communication appeared safer for these specific policies. Therefore, emotional framing cannot rely solely on the emotion's positive or negative character. Its effect depends on the policy context, policy judgement, and aim of narrating. "Emotional discourse is neither inherently manipulative nor always beneficial. Crafted responsibly, it can sustain support for government action while still making liberal democracy feel both open and effective. On a politically contested issue such as migration, that feeling matters just as much" (Gorczeski & Boda, 2026). An additional tool developed within MORES is MORES Pulse, a free AI tool that can detect six emotions in any communication (MORES, 2026; Szabó et al., 2026).

Emotions are not just positive or negative: a policy can stir fear in one citizen, anger in another, hope in a third

Another methodological aspect concerns emotional intensity and its measurement, rooted in **affective intelligence theory** (Marcus et al., 2000). Here, we focus on the methodological side of collecting self-reported data from respondents. Specifically, comparing two formats of measuring emotional responses: conventional radio buttons and a continuous slider as an alternative. Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2017) developed a methodological comparison and distinguished three dimensions: 1) Enthusiasm: hopeful, proud, and enthusiastic; 2) Anxiety: scared, worried, and afraid; 3) Aversion: angry, hateful, bitter, and resentful.

The main finding showed that both formats generated similar and reliable results. However, the new slider format (in contrast to the traditional radio

buttons) offered more continuous data and reduced missing data among respondents. For the objective of this tool, a slider is suggested for use in digital surveys for better reporting of emotional intensity.

The described approaches support the proposed questionnaire, including identifying emotions, measuring their intensity, and selecting emotions based on the policy issue. However, it is an important reminder that the tools rely on self-reported data. Moreover, links between emotions and policy attitudes should be considered with attention, since, apart the from the experimental design (Module B), the survey does not establish a causal relationship. Despite the limitations, the core questionnaire can be used and adapted to the specific policy context.

Because the MORES Survey Tool asks participants to reflect on their own emotional reactions, sometimes to narratives framed around fear or anger, those running it should inform participants about the survey responsibly and transparently; therefore, it is essential to obtain participants' informed consent. Any personal data collected should be processed in accordance with data protection protocols, including the GDPR.



" The tool doesn't replace other evidence. It adds the emotional layer that policy assessments usually miss "

Zsolt Boda
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