

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSITIVE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN EMOTIONS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR AMONG VOTERS IN MACHAKOS COUNTY

Mwanza Lawrence Maingi.

Master of Community Psychology in the Department of Psychology, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Dr. Geoffrey Wango.

Psychology Department, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

©2025

International Academic Journal of Arts and Humanities (IAJAH) | ISSN 2520-4688

Received: 28th May 2025

Published: 9th June 2025

Full Length Research

Available Online at: https://iajournals.org/articles/iajah_v1_i4_233_243.pdf

Citation: Maingi, M. L., Wango, G. (2025). Relationship between positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters in Machakos County. *International Academic Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 1(4), 233-243.

ABSTRACT

Much of politics is emotional. People respond to political objects emotionally, and these emotional reactions can have an impact on people's behaviour and attitudes. Political campaigns are saturated with emotional appeals and try to evoke negative and positive emotions among the electorate. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters in Machakos County. The study objective was to assess the relationship between positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters. This study adopted a correlational research design. Stratified sampling was used to select 400 respondents from 8 electoral wards in Machakos County. Demographic variables of the respondents were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to show the strength of the relationship between positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters. A regression analysis was used to assess the association between the variables and describe the relationship in percentages. Regression was used to show how gender, age, marital status,

employment status, religion, education level, ethnicity, and monthly income contribute to the voting behaviour among voters in Machakos County. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between positive emotions and voting behaviour among the voters, where negative emotions were found to significantly predict voting behaviour. Moreover, marital status, education level and monthly income statistically significantly influenced the relationship between positive voting emotions and voting behaviour. The study concluded that positive electoral campaign emotions significantly predict the voting behaviour of registered voters in Machakos County. The study recommended that strong social sensitization should be carried out by community organizations and electoral commissions to encourage female voters and young people to take part in elections.

Key Words: Election, Electoral campaign, Emotion, Emotional appeal, Politics, Positive emotions, Voting behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Much of politics is emotional. People respond to political objects emotionally, and these emotional reactions can have an impact on people's behaviour and attitudes. Political campaigns are saturated with emotional appeals and try to evoke negative and positive

emotions among the electorate. Brader (2006) states that the vast majority of political ads, for instance, have an appeal to at least one emotion, and some of the appeals are quite strong. Negative campaigning is thought to evoke particularly strong emotions (Chang, 2001). According to Garry (2014), there are emotional bases of political opinion and behaviour and, in particular, there are significant implications of two distinct negative emotions anger and anxiety. The research added that emotional effects during the campaign period are present globally, and these insights were applied to the previously unresearched realm of the emotional bases of voting in European Union (EU) referendums. The hypothesis was that anxious voters rely on substantive EU issues and angry voters rely on second-order factors relating to domestic politics (partisanship and satisfaction with government). Focusing on the case of Irish voting in the Fiscal Compact referendum, and using data from a representative sample of voters, the study found support for the hypotheses. Implications of the findings were then discussed for the understanding of the emotional conditionality of EU referendum voting.

Brader (2006) conducted another study to assess how political ads motivate and persuade voters by appealing to emotions. The study noted that politicians routinely appeal to the emotions of voters, a practice critics claim subverts the rational decision making on which democratic processes properly rest. But we know little about how emotional appeals actually influence voting behaviour. This study demonstrates, for the first time, that political ads can change the way citizens get involved and make choices simply by using images and music to evoke emotions. Prior research suggests voters behave differently in different emotional states but has not established whether politicians can use campaigns to manipulate emotions and thereby cause changes in political behaviour. This article uses two experiments conducted during an actual election to show that: (1) cueing enthusiasm motivates participation and activates existing loyalties; and (2) cueing fear stimulates vigilance, increases reliance on contemporary evaluations, and facilitates persuasion. These results suggest campaigns achieve their goals in part by appealing to emotions, and emotional appeals can promote democratically desirable behaviour.

In Africa, politicians capitalize on the emotions of voters to change their voting behaviour and decisions (Bratton, 2008). Ojekwe (2015) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of political campaigns in shaping the voting behaviour of Nigerian voters. Specifically, the study examined political campaigns of a gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State. A field survey of eligible voters in Lagos State was carried out to further ascertain the efficacy of political campaigns on the electorate. From the field survey, results were collated, analyzed and summarized using frequency tables. Findings from the study showed that political campaigns do not have a strong effect on the electorate's voting behaviour but still play a role in the electoral process. The study concluded that political candidates and parties should concentrate on other election campaign strategies. The researcher further recommended that more studies should be conducted to better understand other factors that influence voting behaviour.

Wafula (2015) conducted to examine voter behaviour in general elections in Kenya between 1992 and 2007. The study aimed at assessing factors that structure voting behaviour. Factors considered included purposive corporate social bonds, primordial corporate social bonds and

socio-demographic variables. The study used a cross-sectional research design with a multistage sampling procedure including purposive sampling and systemic random sampling. The study utilized a sample of 600 respondents, where some were picked from two urban constituencies and six constituencies in rural areas. Data was collected using a questionnaire and analysis conducted using the SPSS software. Results from the study showed that that region, religion and income were the best predictors of voting behaviour. Voters in the then Nyanza (Luo) were highly influenced by social bonds in their voting behaviour, while Islam had a persuasive influence in shaping voting behaviour of its adherents more than any other religion. Voters with a relatively stable income were found to be independent of social bonds in their voting behaviour. Positive campaigning appears to generate different emotional responses, i.e., positive campaigning elicits significantly more positive feelings (Chang, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Political campaigns motivate and persuade voters by appealing to their emotions (Brader, 2006). Negative campaigning not only evokes more emotional responses than positive campaigning (Diagnault et al., 2013), but also different emotional responses, including more negative feelings (Chang, 2001). We have, however, limited knowledge on how these emotional responses exactly influence voting behaviours among voters in Kenya. This study came in handy by examining the relationship between positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters in Machakos County. An emotional appeal is “an attempt to stir feelings of the audience while delivering a political message” (Brader, 2006). Campaign messages tend to be tailored to the emotional state of the potential electorate (Just et al., 2007). Voters respond in general, most favorably to emotional appeals that are in line with their emotional state before exposure to the campaign message, with exception of voters who are experiencing fear (Roseman et al., 2006).

Campaign messages that match the emotion of the recipient are more convincing (DeSteno et al., 2004). There are limited studies linking emotional vulnerabilities of voters and the choices they make during voting in Kenya (Wafula, 2015). This research therefore filled this gap by checking whether there exists a relationship between emotions and voting behaviour, in a bid to establish whether influence in emotions leads to changes in the voting behaviour of voters. Most of the reviewed literature in this study pointed to the fact that emotions during political campaigns have a significant effect on the voting behaviour of voters across the globe (DeSteno et al., 2004; Wafula, 2015; Brader, 2006; Garry, 2014; Chang 2001). However, a study conducted by Ojekwe (2015) found out that electoral campaigns do not have significant influence on the voting behaviour of voters. This study sought to provide clearance on whether emotions during political campaigns have an impact on voting by examining the relationship between positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Field Theory. The proponents of field theory is Kurt Lewis. Field theory holds that behaviour must be derived from a totality of coexisting facts. These coexisting facts make up a dynamic field (Martin, 2003), which means that the state of any part of the field depends on every other part of it. According to field theory, a person's life is

made up of multiple distinct spaces. Individuals may have the same goal, but the field to get there may be different. One's field may be adjusted in order to gain the most in life. Some fields may be deleted, and some added, all depending on certain events that occur in a person's lifetime (Burnes & Cooke, 2013).

Field theory also includes the idea that every person holds a different experience for a situation. This is not to say that two people's experience of an event will not be similar, but that there is some difference. This leads to the idea that no two experiences are the same for a person either, as the dynamic field is constantly changing (Parlett, 1991). This is to say that the dynamic field is like a stream, constantly flowing while changing slightly. Another piece of field theory is the idea that no part of a person's field can be viewed as being pointless.

Every part of a total field must be viewed as having possible meaning and importance. This must be done regardless of how pointless or non-important the part of the field may seem, it should still be accounted for (Parlett, 1991). The totality of an individual's field seems to have no bounds, as research has shown that even an infant's experience of World War II could possibly affect life later on, due to the change in field. This is a good example of how broad field theory can span, as a person's precociousness may be altered due to field changes that occurred before any major development.

From the Field Theory's ideology, the voting behaviour of voters can be altered as a result of electoral campaign emotions. Specifically, politicians can decide to use positive emotions to drive an agenda of success and attachment, thus making voters to vote in their favour. On the other hand, some politicians might decide to use negative emotions to drive agendas of inability, fear and detachment, making voters decide not to vote for some candidates. However, the Field Theory also adds that individuals might respond differently to the same situation. This in turn means that voters can control the impact of electoral emotions, and vote based on objectives and clearly defined facts. Therefore, it is possible to develop and implement strategies that can control the influence of electoral emotions on voting behaviour

Positive Electoral Campaign Emotions and Voting Behaviour among Voters

Candidates engage in positive campaigning when they emphasize their own abilities, accomplishments and policy stands. Some of the emotional appeals commonly identified by researchers as prevalent in positive campaigning are hope, pride, reassurance, compassion and empathy (Kern, 2009). O'cass (2002) conducted a study that focused on issues related to political advertising and electoral behavior through an examination of political advertising believability, the perceived value of information sources utilized and available in election campaigns, voter involvement, confidence, and emotion. The study was undertaken in a state election in Australia. Data was gathered from a sample of registered voters and analyzed using partial least squares. The results indicated that the positive campaign run by the incumbent government was believed by the voters. Further, voter involvement, satisfaction, and emotion affected the believability of the positive campaign. The findings also indicate that non-paid media (television, newspapers) were valued more as sources of positive information by voters than were political advertising and the internet.

Pride is a positive emotion; it is a self-praising and self-conscious emotion. Pride is commonly be assumed to be an indicator of the enthusiasm dimension of the disposition system (Marcus et al., 2000). Pride is characterized by an increase in self-worth as a consequence of taking credit for an achievement. This can be the individual's own achievement or from a person that he or she identifies with. The difference between the emotion pride and happiness is that one does not just enjoys a positive outcome but that one takes personal credit for the achievement (Nabi et al., 2002). Pride would stimulate pro-social behavior (Panagopoulos, 2010). Panagopoulos (2010) finds that pride can potentially stimulate compliance with voting norms, thus mobilize voters to vote. Feelings of pride about a specific candidate are a strong predictor of voters' vote choice (Finn & Glaser, 2010).

Hope carries with it both a sense of agency--in a sense, the capacity to act--and the sense that there is a path forward (Snyder, 2004; Just et al., 2007). Hope, then, is oriented toward the future, but it also offers the prospect of a future that is better than the present. Hope, however, differs somewhat from enthusiasm or joy in that the future still carries with it some uncertainty (Frijda et al., 2009) and it offers the option of change from the current state (Just et al., 2007). Hope is the emotion embedded in campaign promises, which are central to political campaigns (Just et al., 2007). The emotions hope and fear are connected. Campaign messages appealing to hope regarding the preferred need to be combined with campaign messages of fear for the opponent to forge a positive voting decision (Just et al., 2007). Crigler et al., (2006) argue that candidates that inspire hope engage citizens in the campaign. Just et al., (2007) find that hope stimulates voters to use campaign communication as they seek support for their future expectations. Feelings of hope are a strong predictor of voter's' candidate preference and vote choice (Just et al., 2007; Finn & Glaser, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used descriptive survey research design. This method of research was preferred because the researcher was able to collect data to answer questions concerning the status of the subject of study. Descriptive survey research determines and reports the way things are done and also helps a researcher to describe a phenomenon in terms of attitude, values and characteristics (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). According to Orodho (2003), descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. This method was appropriate for the study in that it helped in portraying the accuracy of people's profile events and situations.

Study Population

This study targeted registered voters in Mavoko sub-county, Machakos County. The sub-county has 4 electoral wards. According to records from the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (2017), Mavoko sub-county has the highest number of voters as compared to the other 7 sub-counties, with 118,180 registered voters. The study focused on Mavoko sub-county, also known as Athi-river because the sub-county is relatively cosmopolitan; with different ethnic and social status groups residing in the area due to the sub

county's development in terms of the various factories, companies, good transport network, increased real estate development and proximity to the companies, factories and Nairobi city.

Sample Size and Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to select the sub-county (Mavoko Sub-County) as it has the highest number of registered voters as compared to the other sub-counties in Machakos County. Simple random sampling was used to select the sub-county's ward where the researcher conducted the study. Stratified random sampling procedure was used to sample the respondents who are registered voters to fill in the questionnaires. The voters were stratified according to electoral wards. The sample size will be determined according to a formula proposed by Using Yamane (1973) to determine the sample size;

Using Yamane (1973) formulae

$$n = N / (1 + N * (e)^2)$$

Where

n = sample size

N = the population size

e = the acceptable sampling error (5%) at 95% confidence level

Thus;

$$n = 118,180 / (1 + 118,180 * (0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 400$$

Thus the sample size will 400 respondents.

The researcher therefore targeted 400 registered voters in Mavoko Sub-County. Additionally, the researcher randomly interviewed 10 politicians from the regions; those who conducted campaigns in the region using a KII tool so as to identify their views regarding electoral campaigns and voting behaviour.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using a questionnaire, as well as a Key Informant Interview (KII) schedule. The study's questionnaire will contain closed and open-ended questions, and it will contain three sections. The first section will capture the voters' demographic characteristics, the second section will measure voting behaviours among the voters, while the third section will measure electoral campaign emotions. Pilot testing was conducted using 10% of the total study's sample in a different county. The pilot test was crucial in measuring the instruments' validity and reliability. Findings from the pilot test as well as comments from the university supervisor were used to amend the research instruments, to make them effective in capturing the required data. Collected data was cleaned, re-organized and coded before data analysis. Data for the study was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data collected was keyed in and analyzed with the aid of SPSS version 24. The Quantitative data generated was subjected to the descriptive statistics feature in SPSS to generate mean, and standard deviation which was presented using tables, frequencies and percentages, while Qualitative data consist of words and observations, not numbers. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to show the strength of the relationship between positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters. A regression analysis was used to assess the association between the variables and describe the relationship in percentages. Regression was used to show how gender, age, marital

status, employment status, religion, education level, ethnicity, and monthly income contribute to the voting behaviour among voters in Machakos County.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Positive Electoral Campaign Emotions

The respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agree on the various statements regarding positive electoral campaign emotions. The findings were presented on a five likert scale where 1-Strongly agree, 2-Agree, 3-Neutral, 4-Disagree, and 5-Strongly disagree. The findings are presented in table below.

Table 1. Positive Electoral Campaign Emotions

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
Electoral campaigns make me feel excited	1.41	0.790
I am always interested in electoral campaigns and politics	1.82	0.846
During electoral campaigns, I feel hopeful that the politicians will keep their words	1.91	0.961
Electoral campaigns make me feel thought of by politicians/candidates	1.92	1.000
Electoral campaigns make me feel that politicians/candidates are addressing my concerns and interests	1.79	0.961
Electoral campaigns make me have hope for a better future as a voter	1.79	1.053
Electoral campaigns convince me that political parties and politicians care about people like me	1.73	1.045

From the findings the respondents agreed that electoral campaigns make me feel thought of by politicians/candidates (mean=1.92), followed by during electoral campaigns, I feel hopeful that the politicians will keep their words (mean=1.91), I am always interested in electoral campaigns and politics (mean=1.82), electoral campaigns make me feel that politicians/candidates are addressing my concerns and interests (mean=1.79), electoral campaigns make me have hope for a better future as a voter (mean=1.79), electoral campaigns convince me that political parties and politicians care about people like me (mean=1.73), and that electoral campaigns make me feel excited (mean=1.41). This depicts that electoral campaigns make people feel thought of by politicians/candidates.

Correlation Analysis

Correlational analysis using Pearson’s product moment technique was done to determine the relationship between negative and positive electoral campaign emotions and voting behaviour among voters. Results of the correlation are presented in Table below.

Table 2. Correlation Between Positive Electoral Campaign Emotions and Voting Behaviour Among Voters

		Correlations	
		Voting Behaviour Among Voters	Positive Electoral Campaign Emotions
Voting Behaviour Among Voters	Pearson		
	Correlation	1	.699**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
Positive Electoral Campaign Emotions	Pearson		
	Correlation	.699**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	400
	N	400	400

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table above shows that there is a significant positive relationship between positive electoral emotions and voting behaviour among voters ($r = 0.699$). This implies that there is a very strong association between positive electoral emotions and voting behaviour among voters which is significant. Thus, the study accepts alternative hypothesis that positive electoral campaign emotions have a significant relationship with voting behaviour among voters and reject the null hypothesis that positive electoral campaign emotions do not have a significant relationship with voting behaviour among voters. O'cass (2002) stated that positive campaign run by the incumbent government was believed by the voters. Further, voter involvement, satisfaction, and emotion affected the believability of the positive campaign. The findings also indicate that non-paid media (television, newspapers) were valued more as sources of positive information by voters than were political advertising and the internet. The emotions hope and fear are connected. Campaign messages appealing to hope regarding the preferred need to be combined with campaign messages of fear for the opponent to forge a positive voting decision (Just et al., 2007). Crigler et al., (2006) argue that candidates that inspire hope engage citizens in the campaign. Just et al., (2007) find that hope stimulates voters to use campaign communication as they seek support for their future expectations. Feelings of hope are a strong predictor of voter's' candidate preference and vote choice (Just et al., 2007; Finn & Glaser, 2010). Additionally, age, religion, education level, and monthly income statistically significantly influenced the relationship between positive voting emotions and voting behaviour. However, gender, marital status, employment status and ethnicity did not have a significant influence.

Conclusion of the Study

The study concluded that positive electoral campaign emotions significantly predict the voting behaviour of registered voters in Machakos County. Further, the relationship between positive campaign emotions and voting behaviour is influenced by the voters' marital status, education level and monthly income.

Recommendations of the Study

The study recommended that social sensitization should be carried out by community organizations and electoral commissions to encourage female voters and young people to take part in elections. Well-structured and highly informative campaigns should be carried out by electoral commissions and interested organizations, to sensitize voters on the influence of electoral campaigns on their voting behaviour. This will be useful in encouraging voters to vote objectively. The government, electoral commission and social sensitization groups should continually engage voters in order to come up with effective strategies of minimizing the effect of campaign emotions on voting behaviour.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, D. Iversen, T., & Soskice, D. (2015). Information, inequality, and mass polarization: ideology in advanced democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(13), 1781-1813.
- Anderson, A. K., & Sobel, N. (2003). Dissociating intensity from valence as sensory inputs to emotion. *Neuron*, 39(4), 581-583.
- Bartels, D. M. (2008). Principled moral sentiment and the flexibility of moral judgment and decision making. *Cognition*, 108(2), 381-417.
- Brader, T. (2006). Striking a responsive chord: How political ads motivate and persuade voters by appealing to emotions. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(2), 388-405.
- Craig K. J., Brown K. J., and Baum A (2005). Environmental factors in the etiology of anxiety. In Bloom, Floyd E. & Kupfer David J. (Eds.), *Psychopharmacology: The Fourth Generation of Progress*. New York, NY: Raven Press.1325–1339.
- Crigler, A, Marion J. & Belt T. (2006) The Three Faces of Negative Campaigning: The Democratic Implications of Attack Ads, Cynical News, and FearArousing Messages. In David P. Redlawsk (2006) *Feeling Politics. Emotion in Political Processes*. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan (pp. 135-164).
- Damasio, A. R. (2004). *Descartes' error: emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York: Putnam.
- Frijda, N., H., Kuipers, Peter., and Schure T., Elisabeth (2009). Relations among emotion, appraisal, and emotion action readiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 212–228
- Garry, J. (2014). Emotions and voting in EU referendums. *European Union Politics*, 15(2), 235-254.
- Granovetter, M. (2013). Attitudes towards social networking and sharing behaviors among consumers of direct-to-consumer personal genomics. *Journal of Personalized Medicine*, 3(4), 275-287.

- Haidt, J. (2003) The Moral Emotions. In R. J. Davidson, K.R. Scherer & H.H. Goldsmith (Eds.) *Handbook of Affective Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (pp. 852-870)
- Marcus, George E., Neuman, W. Russell, and Michael M. (2000). *Affective intelligence and political judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Martin, D., & Miller, B. (2003). Space and contentious politics. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 8(2), 143-156.
- Mattes, Kyle and David P. Redlawsk (2015) *The Positive Case for Negative Campaigning*. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (1999). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Acts press.
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, G. A. (2003). *Research methods*.
- Nabi, et. al. (2002). Anger, fear, uncertainty, and attitudes: A test of the cognitive-functional model. *Communication Monographs*, 69(3), 204-216.
- Roseman, Ira, Robert P. A., and Michael E., E. (2006) *Emotion and Political Cognition: Emotional Appeals in Political Communication*. In *Political Cognition*, ed. Richard R. Lau and David O. Sears. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 279-94.
- Russo, S. (2016) Explaining the effects of exposure to negative campaigning. The mediating role of emotions, *Psicologia sociale*, 3: 307-317.
- Snyder, C., R. (1994). *The psychology of hope: You can get there from here*. New York: Free Press.
- Steenbergen, M. R., and Christopher, E. (2006) *Fear and Loathing in American Elections: Context, Traits and Negative Candidate Affect*. In David P. Redlawsk (2006) *Feeling Politics. Emotion in Political Processes*. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan (pp. 109-134).
- Tiedens, L. Z., & Linton, S. (2001). Judgment under emotional certainty and uncertainty: the effects of specific emotions on information processing. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 81(6), 973.
- Wafula, J., O. (2015). *Voter Behaviour in General Elections in Kenya, 1992-2007: Implications for the Development of Liberal Democracy* (Doctoral dissertation, Kenyatta University).
- Yamane, T. (1973). *Statistics: An introduction analysis*. Harper & Row.