

# The Political Is Personal: The Costs of Daily Politics

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Politics and its controversies have permeated everyday life, but the daily impact of politics on the general public is largely unknown. Here, we apply an affective science framework to understand how the public experiences daily politics in a two-part examination. We first used longitudinal, daily diary methods to track two samples of U.S. participants as they experienced daily political events across 2 weeks (Study 1:  $N = 198$ , observations = 2,167) and 3 weeks (Study 2:  $N = 811$ , observations = 12,790) to explore how these events permeated people's lives and how people coped with that influence. In both diary studies, daily political events consistently not only evoked negative emotions, which corresponded to worse psychological and physical well-being, but also greater motivation to take political action (e.g., volunteer, protest) aimed at changing the political system that evoked these emotions in the first place. Understandably, people frequently tried to regulate their politics-induced emotions, and regulating these emotions using effective cognitive strategies (reappraisal and distraction) predicted greater well-being, but also weaker motivation to take action. Although people protected themselves from the emotional impact of politics, frequently used regulation strategies came with a trade-off between well-being and action. Second, we conducted experimental studies where we manipulated exposure to day-to-day politics (Study 3,  $N = 922$ ), and the use of various emotion regulation strategies in response (Study 4,  $N = 1,277$ ), and found causal support for the central findings of Studies 1–2. Overall, this research highlights how politics can be a chronic stressor in people's daily lives, underscoring the far-reaching influence politicians have beyond the formal powers endowed unto them.

**Keywords:** politics, well-being, emotion, emotion regulation, stress

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In the 1960s and 1970s, the student and feminist movements adopted the slogan “the personal is political” to highlight how personal matters scale up to be political matters. In the present research, we explore how the reverse may also be true—how everyday political matters might permeate the average person's life, such that the political is personal. Even though day-to-day political events and controversies often occur far away and revolve around issues that can seem irrelevant to most people's daily lives, we propose that these distant events can have very personal consequences for the average

person. In the present studies, we examined how politics shapes people's emotions, health, and behavior in daily life in a two-part investigation that leveraged both daily diaries and experimental paradigms.

## Bridging Political and Affective Science

To understand the broad influence politics can have on the general public, we bridge political psychology with affective science (Ford

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& Feinberg, 2020). This synthesis provides a novel conceptual backdrop for understanding how day-to-day politics can affect the average person and pushes affective science research to consider the practical outcomes of affective processes in daily life. In applying an affective science framework to political psychology, we integrate three related theoretical traditions to inform our predictions.

First, we integrate the rich literature on chronic stress: Theories of chronic stress define it as insidious and open-ended, stemming from issues that are regularly evoked in daily life (Pearlin, 1989; Wheaton, 1997)—a reasonable description of many Americans' experiences of politics. By conceptualizing politics as a form of chronic stress, we predict that people will regularly experience negative emotions in response to politics in daily life, and that these emotions could jeopardize people's psychological and even physical well-being (Hammen, 2005; Sapolsky, 2004). Second, we integrate the literatures on emotion regulation and coping: Any examination of stress would be incomplete without considering how people protect themselves in the face of that stress, including the regulatory strategies they use to manage their negative emotions (Gross, 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If, as we speculate, people experience a high frequency of negative emotional responses to politics in daily life, we further predict that emotion regulation should be commonly used to reduce these responses, which could in turn help protect well-being.

Finally, we integrate the literature on the functions of emotion: Negative emotions often serve to motivate people to respond to their environment adaptively (Barrett, 2012). In the context of politics, such emotions can encourage citizens to take effective political action and reshape the political system that evoked the negative emotions in the first place (Ford & Feinberg, 2020). As such, we predict that reducing these emotions via regulation strategies in daily life may come with a crucial—and as of yet, untested—trade-off whereby people can protect well-being but at a cost to the motivation to take political action. If so, this would underscore the need for a more nuanced perspective on the value of emotion regulation than is typical in the affective sciences. Most work on emotion regulation and coping with chronic stressors (even daily hassles) highlights the utility and importance of using effective regulation strategies to manage unpleasant emotions in the face of stress. Yet, if these strategies prevent people from acting to change a problematic status quo, it is crucial to recognize their use can also have negative consequences.

Bridging political psychology with an affective science framework to examine the daily toll of U.S. politics carries not only the above conceptual implications, but also key methodological implications. Namely, political research has focused largely on designs that hinge on singular, major events (e.g., presidential elections), but such events cannot reflect the possible daily patterns that unfold as people manage the recurring stress of politics in daily life. Using the methodological tools of affective science can help us understand the politically charged emotional dynamics of daily life (Almeida, 2005; Brans et al., 2013). To begin understanding these dynamics, we conducted two studies using daily diary methods: An individualized, longitudinal approach that provides a unique opportunity to capture people's emotional reactions to day-to-day political events, daily well-being, motivation to take political action, and use of emotion regulation. Then, to complement this approach, we conducted two experimental studies, examining the causal influence daily politics can have on citizens by manipulating exposure to day-to-day politics, as well as the use of emotion regulation to protect oneself from the toll of day-to-day politics.

## The Political Is Personal

There are multiple pathways through which daily politics can regularly evoke negative emotional experiences. Political policies can impede autonomy and cost money, and therefore directly threaten people's livelihood, triggering a host of negative emotions. More abstractly, politics is often intrinsically linked to people's core moral beliefs and convictions (e.g., polarizing "culture war" issues, like abortion and immigration; Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt, 2012; Koleva et al., 2012). Because moral convictions are central to people's sense of self (Strohmingier & Nichols, 2015), political events that challenge moral convictions are experienced as a personal affront and met with strong negative emotional responses (Haidt, 2001, 2012; Kovacheff et al., 2018). Additionally, individuals commonly develop a sense of social identification with a political party (Huddy, 2002; West & Iyengar, 2020), which engenders a personal stake in how that group fares, often to the point where people's self-esteem tracks with the group's successes and failures (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This may be especially true for people who have formed parasocial relationships with political figures, developing a (one-sided) emotional bond with them (Cohen & Holbert, 2021). Considering the many ways in which politics becomes personal, it is easy to see how the political landscape—its daily controversies, accusations, and discord—can become a chronic stressor for many citizens.

Some research has begun to provide evidence of the emotional impact of politics on the average person. Almost all of this research has focused specifically on the outcomes of presidential elections and has consistently demonstrated that partisans feel strongly negative when their party loses an election (Pierce et al., 2015; Stanton et al., 2009, 2010). In recent years, people also experience negative emotion far in advance of elections. For example, in a 2019 poll, 56% of U.S. voters reported that the upcoming 2020 election was a significant source of stress, a full year before the election (American Psychological Association, 2019). These studies indicate that significant political events such as presidential elections may be internalized by many in the general public, yet the nature of modern politics—its daily controversies, incivility, and ineptitude—should resonate *beyond* major political events, affecting the average citizen daily rather than once every 4 years.

Although no research to our knowledge has explored how *daily* political events affect people, polling data strongly suggest that modern politics more generally poses a regular emotional burden on Americans. For example, across >10 years of polling starting in 2006, the percentage of Americans who feel frustrated or angry with the government has been consistently high (73%–86%), whereas the percentage who feel "basically content" has been consistently low (11%–22%; Pew Research Center, 2017). These polls underscore the importance of broadening scientists' focus beyond singular, major political events, such as election losses, and highlighting how even day-to-day political happenings (e.g., a politician's recent public statement, a new policy being debated in congress) can have serious consequences for the average citizen's daily emotional lives.

## Does Politics Impair Daily Well-Being?

It is well established that experiencing negative emotions, over time, translates into worse well-being (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Cohen, 1996), but very few studies have examined

whether negative emotional responses to politics predict worse well-being<sup>1</sup> (Mefford et al., 2020; Simchon et al., 2020; Stanton et al., 2010), and none to our knowledge have examined the impact of politics beyond the influence of presidential elections, leaving many unanswered questions about how politics can affect psychological and physical well-being on a day-to-day basis. Recent research examining presidential elections suggests that major political stressors like election losses do not, in fact, result in durable changes to people's well-being (Roche & Jacobson, 2019). For example, the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in the United States, where Donald Trump beat Hillary Clinton, did not have a prolonged impact on liberal Americans' well-being (Simchon et al., 2020). These findings may run contrary to popular belief, but they are quite consistent with the literature examining major stressors which tends to find that people are remarkably adaptable and resilient. In the face of major stressors (e.g., bereavement, divorce, job loss), people tend to recover within a relatively short time span (Bonanno, 2004). Though it may seem counterintuitive, by focusing primarily on major events like election losses, researchers may have focused on the types of events from which people are most likely to recover.

We propose that it is useful to consider the stress of daily political events. Indeed, politics is not a single event, but rather a steady stream of events that continues on a regular basis, and its daily toll on well-being could be significant. Indeed, research on nonpolitical stressors has demonstrated that accumulated daily stressors have a powerful and prolonged impact on people's well-being (Almeida, 2005; Kanner et al., 1981; Pillow et al., 1996). Thus, unlike single dramatic events like presidential elections, day-to-day politics may represent a more plausible pathway through which politics shapes people's well-being over time. It is thus necessary to go beyond the impact of singular political events and instead assess the day-to-day associations between peoples' daily emotional responses to politics and daily well-being over time (Roche & Jacobson, 2019)—a novel theoretical and methodological approach we adopt in the present research.

### Can People Protect Themselves From Politics?

Although politics can take a daily toll on people's well-being, people are not defenseless in the face of stress. When facing daily stressors, people often manage their emotional responses using emotion regulation strategies (Ford et al., 2017; Gross, 2015; Heiy & Cheavens, 2014). To anticipate which strategies people will likely use when managing emotions about politics, it is again useful to consider politics as a chronic stressor, characterized by hard-to-change environments (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Ford & Feinberg, 2020). In such contexts, people often turn to methods of coping that involve adapting to the stressor by changing one's emotions (Biggs et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2014). Because emotion regulation is so common when people face stress in daily life, any analysis of the emotional consequences of politics would be incomplete without also accounting for how people protect themselves from the ill-effects of politics.

People rely on a variety of tools to change their emotions when facing nonpolitical stressors in daily life (Brans et al., 2013; Ford et al., 2017; Heiy & Cheavens, 2014) and these patterns likely extend to political stressors as well. For instance, people often reframe situations in ways that reduce their emotional impact (*cognitive reappraisal*; e.g., reminding oneself that a situation is not as bad as it

seems, or that even bad situations can have silver linings). People also direct attention away from emotionally evocative events (*distraction*; e.g., tuning out of distressing conversations, or changing the channel from upsetting news stories). People even commonly hide their emotions from others in daily life (*expressive suppression*). Although each of these strategies are recruited frequently when people face stress in daily life, the strategies differ in how effective they are at helping people feel better. Cognitive reappraisal appears to be particularly useful at helping reduce negative emotion, even in the face of evocative political events (Feinberg et al., 2014; Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019; Mehta et al., 2020). Distraction also has been found helpful to manage political stress in some contexts (Mehta et al., 2020). Expressive suppression has rarely been considered within the political context (Feinberg et al., 2014), but prior results from nonpolitical studies suggest suppression is relatively unhelpful for reducing negative emotional experiences (Webb et al., 2012) or may even backfire (Goldin et al., 2008). These prior results begin to suggest that whereas multiple forms of emotion regulation are likely commonly used when facing the daily stress of politics, only certain forms of regulation are likely to help individuals feel better, including reappraisal and potentially distraction.

### Does Protection Come With a Trade-Off?

Although it is natural to want to feel better in the face of stress, feeling better can come with both benefits and costs. On one hand, reducing unpleasant negative emotions evoked by daily stressors can predict better overall well-being (e.g., greater life satisfaction, less depression; Ford et al., 2018), underscoring how vital it is to effectively manage one's emotions. On the other hand, however, reducing negative emotions can also minimize the value those emotions provide (Feinberg et al., 2020). From a functionalist perspective, emotions serve as a useful guide for behavior (Barrett, 2012; Frijda, 1986, 1992; Keltner & Gross, 1999). In the realm of politics, the strong emotions that people feel in response to political events may inspire them to take political action (Miller et al., 2009; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). These actions—protesting, contacting representatives, donating to a cause—can create important societal change as individuals strive to improve upon the status quo (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Van Zomeren & Aarti, 2009).

Of note, the particular emotions daily politics evoke may differentially impact individuals' motivations to take political action. Past work, for instance, has found anger and outrage to be primary drivers of action, whereas the experience of other negative emotions, like fear or disgust, motivate individuals less or differently (Bodenhausen et al., 1994; Lambert et al., 2019; Lerner et al., 2003; Skitka et al., 2006). The theorized relationship between negative emotion and action described above, therefore, might occur for anger felt in response to daily politics and not other negative emotions. However, other work finds negative emotions are often highly interrelated and show similar patterns of associations with political action (Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019), suggesting that *which* emotions individuals experience in response to daily politics might

<sup>1</sup> Emotions can be individual-based or group-based depending on whether the emotion-eliciting appraisal occurs at the individual or group level (Smith, 1993; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Here we do not distinguish between individual- and group-based emotions because we expect both to similarly impact people's well-being and political action tendencies.

matter less than *how much* negative emotion they experience—something we explore in the present research.

Taken together, prior theory and research suggest that experiencing higher levels of negative emotion—and perhaps some emotions more than others—in response to political events should correspond with greater daily motivation to participate in political action (Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019). However, as individuals reduce this negative emotion through emotion regulation, they should also be less motivated to engage in political actions aimed at building a better society. This points to a trade-off when people successfully manage their emotions in response to politics: greater personal well-being but less political action (see Figure 1)—an idea thus far unexplored in the literature.<sup>2</sup>

## The Present Research

In viewing politics from an affective science framework, we make several predictions. We hypothesize that daily political events will consistently elicit negative emotions in the day-to-day lives of citizens. These negative emotions should, in turn, predict worse daily well-being. But, at the same time, they should serve the important function of motivating citizens to take political action aimed at altering the political system that evoked the negative emotions in the first place. Furthermore, when facing political stressors, individuals will use a variety of emotion regulation strategies to not only reduce their negative emotional experience, some of which (e.g., reappraisal) should protect their well-being, but also decrease the motivation to take political action.

We test our theorizing using two complementary methodological approaches. In Part I of the article, we present two studies using daily diaries, whereby participants reported their responses to daily political events across 2 weeks (Study 1) or 3 weeks (Study 2) of daily life. Then in Part II, we present two experimental studies that manipulated exposure to daily politics (Study 3) and the use of emotion regulation strategies in response to daily politics (Study 4) to examine the causal nature of our theorizing. Across studies, we assessed negative emotional responses to daily politics and their associated outcomes, considering both the role of negative affect in general and discrete emotions. We measured well-being outcomes using both psychological (e.g., life satisfaction) and physical (e.g., fatigue) indices and assessed political action using measures of general political action motivation (Studies 1–4) and likelihood (Studies 3–4), as well as specific political actions participants engaged in (Study 2). In addition, we measured (Studies 1–2) and manipulated (Study 4) emotion regulation, focusing primarily on reappraisal and distraction (Studies 1–2, and 4) given how efficacious past work has found them to be, while also exploring expressive suppression (Studies 1–2) and emotional acceptance (Studies 2 and 4). This set of methods allows us to first understand how these patterns unfold in daily life (Studies 1–2), then manipulate exposure to politics (Study 3) and emotion regulation (Study 4) to examine their causal role while ruling out alternative hypotheses (e.g., people simply having a bad day reporting greater negative emotion to politics and worse well-being; people feeling less negative emotion merely finding it easier to regulate their emotions successfully). These studies aim to bridge disparate literatures, using well-known paradigms from affective science and emotion regulation research to better understand how politics shapes the lives of the public.

We recruited people from across the political spectrum (Democrats and Republicans in Studies 1–4, and those not identified with either party in Studies 2–4) and had no recruitment requirement about how politically engaged they might be (Studies 2–4). This sampling helped to ensure our participants represented a broad swath of the American population, providing for a more generalizable test of our hypotheses about how daily politics affects the average citizen. Furthermore, our studies took place while a Republican (Studies 1–2) and Democrat (Studies 3–4) were in the White House, and while Republicans (Study 1) and Democrats (Studies 3–4) controlled the legislative branch, as well as when control was split (Study 2), meaning our results would unlikely be due to which president or party was in power.

Data and analysis syntax for all Studies 1–4 results are provided at on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/c7fq9/>). Supplementary analyses and all materials are provided in the [online Supplemental Materials](#) document. All study procedures were approved by the University of Toronto institutional review board (Protocol Numbers 31102 and 33962).

## Part I

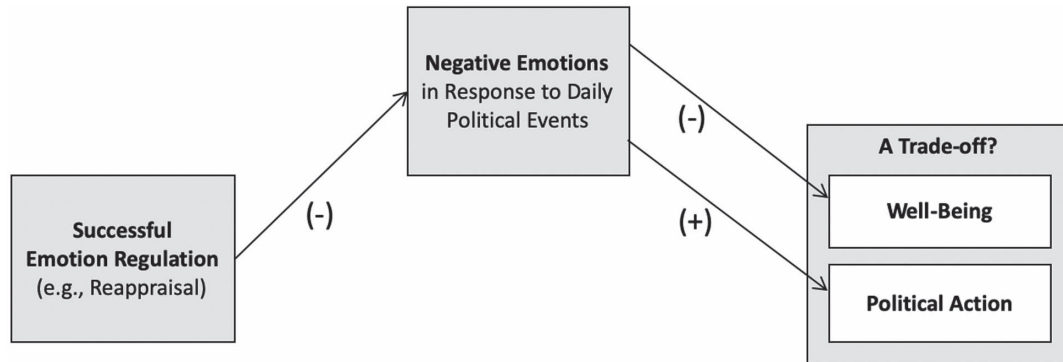
In Part I, to test our hypotheses using well-powered designs targeting daily life, we conducted two daily diary studies—a well-established and validated technique central to affective science research but rarely used to answer political psychology questions (Almeida, 2005; Gunther & Wenzel, 2012). For both studies, we recruited geographically, socioeconomically, and politically diverse samples of Americans (Study 1  $N = 198$ ; Study 2  $N = 811$ ). Study 1 was conducted across three separate consecutive 2-week waves in late 2017 and early 2018 (*total observations* = 2,167) during which a number of different day-to-day political events occurred (e.g., conflict with another country, brief government shutdown, public statement from the president). Study 2 was conducted over 3 weeks in late 2019 (*total observations* = 12,790) during which a number of day-to-day political events occurred (e.g., democratic primary debates, public statements from politicians; impeachment investigation of Donald Trump). Taken together, these two studies and their combined 14,957 observations provide a well-powered and in-depth perspective on the role that politics plays in people's day-to-day lives.

To assess people's daily experiences, Studies 1 and 2 participants reported the political event they thought about most that day, the emotions they felt in response, and how they managed those emotions (e.g., reappraisal, distraction, suppression). Participants also reported their daily psychological well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, sense of purpose, depression), physical well-being (e.g., fatigue, illness), and motivation to engage in political action (e.g., donate money, attend a protest). In accordance with best practices for the daily diary method, reports were made at the end of the day (Almeida, 2005; Almeida et al., 2002), allowing us to target the political event that participants thought most about on a given day, whenever it may have occurred.

<sup>2</sup> Here, we propose a theoretical model whereby reducing negative emotional responses to politics (using effective forms of emotion regulation) has two *independent* sets of outcomes: greater well-being but also less motivation to take political action. Such a pattern also indicates that it may be possible to independently increase both well-being and action in politically evocative contexts (or at least, protect well-being without jeopardizing action)—we explore these possibilities empirically and further discuss this idea in the General Discussion section.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Figure Demonstrating How Emotion Regulation Can Be Used to Reduce Negative Emotions in Response to Stressful Political Events, With a Resulting Trade-Off Between Well-Being and Political Action*



*Note.* Although negative emotional responses to politics should accumulate and promote worse well-being, these emotions may also drive political action. As such, emotion regulation can come with a trade-off, whereby people are able to protect their well-being, but coming with a cost to political action.

Research indicates that end-of-day ratings (e.g., of daily emotional experiences) are very highly correlated with aggregated ratings made from during the day (e.g., ecological momentary assessment ratings, with  $r$ s up to .97; Neubauer et al., 2020), suggesting that for the present research question, end-of-day ratings have the benefit of allowing us to validly capture responses to a salient daily event without needing additional sampling that can be intrusive and burdensome for participants.

Our daily measurement approach allowed us to examine both how people differed from each other (between-person effects) and how each person's experiences fluctuated across each day (within-person effects). For example, in the between-person effects, we capture whether people who feel worse about politics *on average* are also more likely to experience worse well-being in daily life. In the within-person effects, we control for the extent to which some people are more likely to be upset about politics in general and capture whether people's well-being is worse on days when they feel worse about politics than they typically do. These analyses provide a valuable two-fold test of whether political events correspond with people's day-to-day experiences, including both well-being and political action. To bring these fluctuations to life, see Figure 2 for one participant's negative emotion in response to daily political events and their well-being across 2 weeks in Study 1, and see Figure 3 for a participant's negative emotion in response to daily political events and their motivation to take political action across 3 weeks in Study 2.

## Study 1

### Study 1: Methods

**Participants.** We collected sufficient data (i.e., at least 85 observations) to detect a small effect at both levels of our multilevel models (Cohen, 1992). Our final sample consisted of 2,167 surveys completed by 198 American residents recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (67% women, 76% White,  $M_{\text{age}} = 38$  years;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12$  years). Participants were eligible for the study if they thought about politics daily, identified as either Republican (35% of sample)

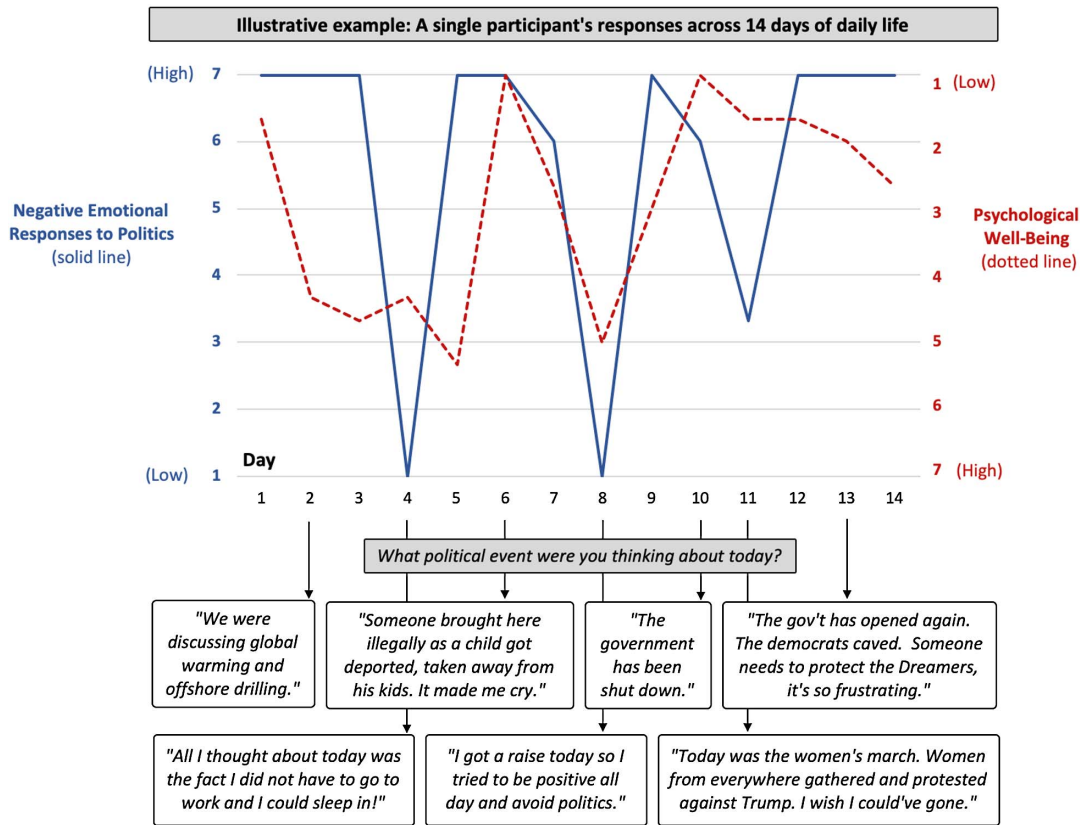
or Democrat (65% of sample), were comfortable using a smartphone app to participate, and were currently in a romantic relationship (this criterion is not relevant to the present investigation). See [online Supplemental Materials](#), for information regarding participant payment, response rates, missing data, and data quality checks.

**Measures.** During each daily survey, participants reported their psychological and physical well-being, negative emotion, emotion regulation, and political action. For all composites, we computed composite reliabilities at both the within-person ( $\omega^w$ ) and between-person ( $\omega^b$ ) levels using multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (Lai, 2021). See Table 1, for descriptive statistics.

**Psychological and Physical Well-Being.** Psychological well-being was measured each day using four items on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and averaged together: "Today, I felt satisfied with life," "Today, I felt like my life has a clear sense of purpose," "I felt depressed today" (reverse scored), and "Today, I felt stressed" (reverse scored).<sup>3</sup> Physical well-being was measured each day using two items, rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), reverse coded, and averaged together: "I felt tired or fatigued today," and "I felt sick today."

**Negative Emotional Responses to Politics.** Participants were asked to describe a specific political event that they had been thinking about. To encourage participants to report any type of event (e.g., positive or negative), this prompt was intentionally phrased to be neutral ("what U.S. political event or situation have you been thinking about today? (e.g., a politician's recent public statement, a new policy being debated in congress, the U.S.'s role in international events) ..."). See [online Supplemental Materials](#), for more information about the types of events participants described (e.g., State of the Union, conflict with another country, a new law or bill being debated by congress).

<sup>3</sup> We also confirmed that the pattern of results is the same for separate composites for the "satisfied" and "purpose" items (i.e., a well-being composite) and the "stress" and "depressed" items (i.e., an ill-being composite) to ensure that the pattern of results was not being driven by either the positive or negatively-framed items (see SOM for details).

**Figure 2***An Illustrative Example of Responses to Politics in Daily Life From Study 1*

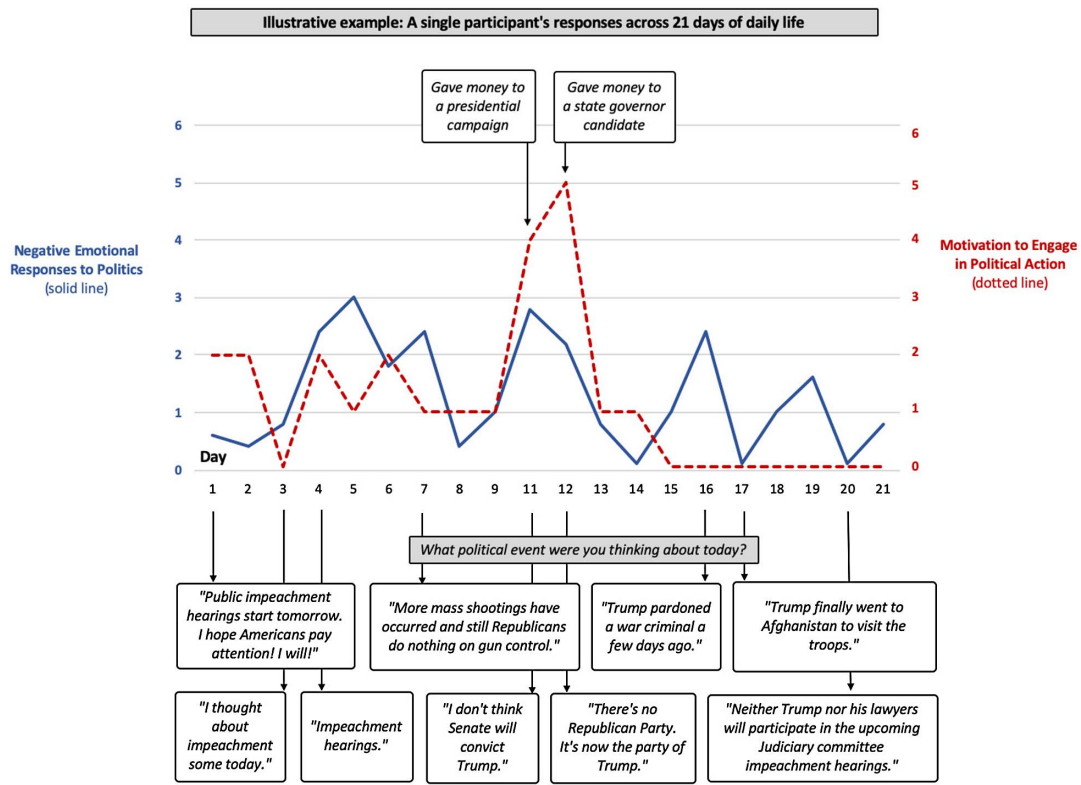
*Note.* This figure depicts responses from one representative participant from Study 1 illustrating daily fluctuations in negative emotional responses to political events (solid line) and psychological well-being (dotted line). The scale for well-being has been reversed to more clearly illustrate the link between higher negative emotion and lower well-being. Several representative daily political events are also included (edited for confidentiality and brevity). This participant experienced several peaks in negative emotion (coupled with lower well-being) corresponding to distressing political events (e.g., a government shutdown), as well as several troughs of negative emotion corresponding to either not thinking about politics that day (Days 4 and 8, which were coupled with higher well-being) or thinking about a positive political event (Day 11). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Participants then rated the negative emotions they felt in response to the event using six items, based on the modified Differential Emotions Scale (Fredrickson et al., 2003) which uses single items consisting of multiple adjectives describing anger ("angry, irritated, annoyed"), fear ("scared, fearful, afraid"), disgust ("disgust, distaste, revulsion"), sadness ("sad, downhearted, unhappy"), shame ("ashamed, humiliated, embarrassed"), and outrage ("morally outraged"). Each item was rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and averaged together.<sup>4</sup> The findings reported below were comparable when considering each of the specific negative emotions as when examining the composite. As such, we report the composite results in the main text for parsimony and report all discrete emotion analyses in the [online Supplemental Materials](#).

**Emotion Regulation.** Participants reported their use of three strategies: reappraisal, distraction, and suppression. Derived from the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), we used single items that corresponded to commonly used items used in other diary studies (Blanke et al., 2020). Specifically, participants

completed separate ratings for how hard they tried to use a strategy (regulation attempts) and how successfully they used the strategy (regulation success) on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) for reappraisal ("When thinking about politics today, I tried to make myself think about the situation in a way that would help me feel calmer," and "When thinking about politics today, I was successful at making myself think about the situation in a way that would help me feel calmer"), distraction ("Today I tried to distract myself from thinking about politics," and "Today, I was successful at distracting myself from thinking about politics"), and suppression ("Today, I tried to hide how I was feeling about politics

<sup>4</sup> As filler items, we also assessed positive emotion items in Study 1 ("hopeful, optimistic, encouraged," "glad, happy, joyful," "amused, entertained") and Study 2-4 ("hopeful, optimistic, encouraged," "glad, happy, joyful," "proud"). In Study 1 and 2, we also assessed compassion and schadenfreude ("This event made me feel sympathy and compassion for people who are not in my political party," "This event made me feel like people who were not in my political party were getting what they deserve."), which were not relevant to the present investigation.

**Figure 3***An Illustrative Example of Responses to Politics in Daily Life From Study 2*

*Note.* This figure depicts responses from one representative participant from Study 2 illustrating daily fluctuations in negative emotional responses to political events (solid line) and motivation to engage in political action (dotted line). We also note the political action behaviors the participant engaged in, which co-occurred with peaks in motivation. Several representative daily political events are also included (edited for confidentiality and brevity). This participant experienced multiple peaks in negative emotion (e.g., Day 11, coupled with higher motivation for political action), as well as several troughs of negative emotion corresponding to positive political events (e.g., Day 17). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

from others,” and “Today, I was successful at hiding how I was feeling about politics from others”). In all multilevel models, we focus on regulation *success* and hold constant (i.e., control for) emotion regulation *attempts*, given that regulation successes and

attempts are conceptually and empirically distinct (Ford et al., 2017), and it is the *successful* use of a strategy that should impact emotional outcomes, not merely the amount of effort exerted attempting the strategy.

**Table 1***Study 1 Descriptive Statistics for All Core Study Variables*

Study variable	<i>M</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	ICC	Reliability ( $\omega$ ) for composites	
			Within ( $\omega^a$ )	Between ( $\omega^b$ )
Negative emotion composite	4.11 (0.08)	.36	.89; 95% CI [.88, .89]	.75; 95% CI [.69, .79]
Emotion regulation strategies				
Reappraisal success	4.28 (0.07)	.31	—	—
Distraction success	4.40 (0.07)	.28	—	—
Suppression success	4.02 (0.07)	.27	—	—
Daily outcomes				
Psychological well-being	4.94 (0.08)	.55	.76; 95% CI [.74, .77]	.83; 95% CI [.78, .85]
Physical well-being	4.84 (0.09)	.48	.50; 95% CI [.45, .55]	.70; 95% CI [.62, .77]
Political action motivation	2.44 (0.08)	.35	—	—

*Note.* *SE* = standard error; ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Response scale for all core study variables was 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Means reflect the intercept values from multilevel models with a random intercept to account for the nested nature of the data. ICCs are calculated for the null model. For composite measures, we calculated reliability composites at both the within- and between-person levels. 95% CIs were calculated using Monte Carlo simulations.

**Political Action.** We assessed motivation to engage in political action with one item (“Today, I felt motivated to take political action (e.g., donate money, volunteer time, attend a protest, contact my governmental representatives)”), rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We also measured whether participants engaged in any political action behaviors that day using a binary (*yes, no*) variable, with a follow-up question where they could briefly describe the action they took. In Study 1, we focus on the motivation to take action as it represents a reliable and valid predictor of future political action in prior research (e.g.,  $r > .60$ ; Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019) and can be validly assessed every day. We did not expect to observe high levels of political action behaviors during any given 2-week time frame given that specific political action behaviors occur relatively infrequently, usually manifesting after the motivation to take action has built up over time, reaching a tipping point where grievances become too much to bear.<sup>5</sup>

**Political Orientation.** During a baseline survey, a single item assessed participants’ political party. Additionally, three items asked participants about their social, economic, and general political ideology, assessed on a scale from 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative*). The composite was highly reliable ( $\alpha = .97$ ) and yielded an average score of 3.34 ( $SD = 1.92$ ).

**Procedure.** After completing a screener questionnaire to determine eligibility for the present study, eligible participants were invited to complete a background survey which included measures of demographics, political party, and political ideology, as well as other trait measures not relevant to the present investigation. Participants then downloaded the smartphone app used to administer the daily surveys (ExperienceSampler; Thai & Page-Gould, 2018). Several days later, participants received a notification on their phone at 8 p.m. (their local time) that their survey was ready. Each night, participants received a reminder notification at 10 p.m. if they had not completed their survey. After midnight, the survey was no longer available and was considered missed.

The core study variables were collected in three consecutive waves of data, each lasting for 2 weeks. This allowed for continuous coverage of political events that occurred across those 6 weeks, across three sets of participants: December 27, 2017–January 9, 2018 (Wave 1); January 10, 2018–January 23, 2018 (Wave 2); and January 24, 2018–February 6, 2018 (Wave 3). Each daily survey began with participants reporting their daily psychological and physical well-being. Participants then reported their emotional responses to the specific political event that they had been thinking about that day, how they regulated those emotional responses, and how motivated they were to engage in political action. Importantly, we assessed psychological and physical well-being *prior* to asking participants about the political event to help ensure participants reported their well-being in a more general context and were not influenced by recently answering questions relating to politics. In addition, several other variables not relevant to the present hypotheses were collected daily (e.g., media consumption, relationship measures) and are not discussed further.

**General Analytic Strategy.** We analyzed our data using multilevel models, using an unstructured covariance matrix and Satterthwaite degrees of freedom. We conducted two-level models with a random intercept for each participant, allowing the average amounts of each daily outcome to vary between individuals. Although there were no apparent time trends, we also included a

centered version of day and a random slope of diary day (i.e., time) to allow for different trajectories across the 14 days of the surveys between individuals (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013),<sup>6</sup> and we controlled for the wave in which the data were collected to account for differences in the events that occurred during each 2-week data collection wave. In all analyses involving a regulation strategy, we included how much effort people put into that strategy as a control variable to isolate the predictive validity of successfully using the strategy on downstream outcomes.

To facilitate interpretation of intercepts in our analyses, we subtracted the mean of our predictor variables across participants and time points from each score (grand-mean centered). In addition, because our predictors varied both between- and within-participants, we created between-person versions of the predictor variables by centering each individual’s daily responses on the grand mean and calculating each person’s mean across all their daily responses, and created within-person versions of the predictor variables by centering each person’s daily responses on their own mean. We entered both the between-person predictor and the within-person predictor in all models. These analyses provide a unique, dual test of how political events correspond to people’s day-to-day experiences: how people differed from each other (between-person effects) and how each person’s experiences fluctuated across each day compared to their own average (within-person effects). Last, to examine whether political orientation might influence these results, we also conducted exploratory analyses with political orientation (party or ideology) as a moderator.

## Study 1: Results

In the following results, we first consider how people are responding to politics in daily life. We next examine whether negative emotions about politics predict worse daily well-being. Then, we examine how people use emotion regulation to protect their emotions in daily life and examine whether successful emotion regulation predicts not only better daily well-being but also less political action. Last, we test the robustness of these patterns and examine the role of political orientation.

**How Are People Responding to Politics in Daily Life?** Results indicate that day-to-day political events commonly evoke negative emotional reactions. When thinking about the most salient political event of the day—even though our prompt was designed to be neutral and did *not* specifically ask about negative events—people felt at least some degree of any negative emotion (i.e., above the lowest scale

<sup>5</sup> Within Study 1, 17% of the sample ( $n = 34$ ) reported engaging in at least one political action behavior during the study. Even with these low base rates, the motivation to take political action still significantly predicted whether or not someone engaged in action during the study, *odds ratio*: 1.50,  $p = .011$ , thereby validating our measure of motivation. See Study 2 for more discussion of political action behaviors: By quadrupling the sample size (Study 1  $N = 198$  vs. Study 2  $N = 811$ ) and increasing the study duration from 14 days to 21 days, Study 2 is better powered and designed to consider specific political action behaviors.

<sup>6</sup> We also tested maximal models for our analyses (Barr, 2013) where we specified all possible random slopes. When including these random slopes resulted in a model that was too complex to converge, we trimmed the smallest random effects (based on effect size) until the model converged. The fixed effects of these models very closely paralleled the fixed effects reported in the article (see SOM for details). We report the simpler models in the main article because some maximal models failed to converge when we controlled for demographic variables.

point) on 81% of the days and felt stronger levels of any negative emotion (i.e., at or above the scale midpoint) on 45% of the days.

**Do Negative Emotions About Politics Predict Worse Well-Being?** Negative emotions were associated with worse well-being (Table 2): Between-person effects indicated that feeling more negative emotion in response to political events, on average, was associated with worse daily psychological and physical well-being. Similarly, within-person effects indicated that when participants felt more negative on a given day than they typically felt in response to a political event, they experienced worse psychological well-being and worse physical well-being.

**How Are People Protecting Their Emotions in Daily Life?** People were commonly motivated to regulate the emotions they felt in response to day-to-day political events. When focusing on emotion regulation *attempts*, people attempted reappraisal to at least some degree (i.e., ratings above the lowest scale point) on 84% of the days, attempted distraction on 80% of the days, and attempted suppression on 70% of the days.

When focusing on emotion regulation *success*, we found that using emotion regulation more successfully, in turn, was associated with lower negative emotional responses to politics for all strategies (see Table 2, for statistics): People who more successfully used reappraisal, distraction, or suppression on average experienced less negative emotion (between-person effect), and when participants were more successful at using reappraisal, distraction, or suppression on a given day than they typically were, they experienced less negative emotion (within-person effect).

In spite of people's diverse attempts to regulate their emotions, reappraisal was the only strategy that was *uniquely* associated with lower negative emotion: When all three strategies were entered simultaneously into a multilevel model to predict negative emotion in

response to daily political events, only reappraisal significantly predicted lower negative emotions for both the between-person effect,  $b = -0.49$  95% confidence interval [CI]  $[-0.79, -0.20]$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $p = .001$ , and the within-person effect,  $b = -0.14$  95% CI  $[-0.19, -0.08]$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ . Successfully using suppression and distraction were no longer significant predictors of negative emotion in this model,  $ts < 1.74$ ,  $ps > .082$ . Thus, in subsequent analyses, we focused on reappraisal success (see Table 2, for additional findings for other strategies).

**Through Lower Negative Emotion, Does Emotion Regulation Predict Better Daily Well-Being?** People who used reappraisal more successfully on average experienced higher levels of psychological and physical well-being (between-person effects), and when people used reappraisal more successfully on a given day than they typically did, they experienced better psychological and physical well-being (within-person effects). Building on these results, we used 1–1–1 unconflated multilevel mediation models in MPlus (Preacher et al., 2010) and found evidence for a mediational pathway between reappraisal and well-being such that successfully using reappraisal was associated with lower negative emotion and, in turn, greater psychological and physical well-being, both between and within individuals (see Figure 4 and see online Supplemental Materials, for detailed statistics).

**Through Lower Negative Emotion, Does Emotion Regulation Predict Less Political Action?** Although negative emotion was linked with worse well-being, it was also linked with greater motivation to engage in political action: People who felt more negative about daily political events on average were more motivated to take political action (between-person effect) and when people experienced more negative emotion in response to a political event on a given day than they usually felt, they were also more motivated to take political

**Table 2**

*Study 1 Multilevel Model Analyses Testing the Between- and Within-Person Association Between Emotion Regulation Success, Negative Emotion, and the Daily Outcomes*

Predictors	Negative emotion	Well-being		
		Psychological	Physical	Political action motivation
Between-person associations				
Negative emotion	—	$b = -0.30$ (0.07) CI [-0.44, -0.15], $p < .001$	$b = -0.29$ (0.08) CI [-0.45, -0.14], $p < .001$	$b = 0.33$ (0.07) CI [0.19, 0.46], $p < .001$
Reappraisal success	$b = -0.57$ (0.11) CI [-0.78, -0.36], $p < .001$	$b = 0.36$ (0.12) CI [0.13, 0.60], $p = .003$	$b = 0.30$ (0.13) CI [0.05, 0.57], $p = .021$	$b = -0.13$ (0.11) CI [-0.36, 0.09], $p = .265$
Distraction success	$b = -0.27$ (0.09) CI [-0.45, -0.10], $p = .003$	$b = 0.18$ (0.10) CI [-0.03, 0.38], $p = .087$	$b = 0.23$ (0.11) CI [0.03, 0.44], $p = .031$	$b = -0.10$ (0.09) CI [-0.28, 0.09], $p = .295$
Suppression success	$b = -0.25$ (0.09) CI [-0.43, -0.07], $p = .007$	$b = 0.07$ (0.10) CI [-0.14, 0.27], $p = .503$	$b = 0.09$ (0.11) CI [-0.13, 0.30], $p = .404$	$b = -0.08$ (0.09) CI [-0.27, 0.11], $p = .405$
Within-person associations				
Negative emotion	—	$b = -0.06$ (0.02) CI [-0.09, -0.03], $p = .001$	$b = -0.07$ (0.02) CI [-0.11, -0.03], $p = .001$	$b = 0.10$ (0.02) CI [0.05, 0.14], $p < .001$
Reappraisal success	$b = -0.16$ (0.03) CI [-0.21, -0.11], $p < .001$	$b = 0.07$ (0.02) CI [0.03, 0.11], $p < .001$	$b = 0.05$ (0.02) CI [0.01, 0.10], $p = .028$	$b = -0.07$ (0.03) CI [-0.12, -0.02], $p = .004$
Distraction success	$b = -0.10$ (0.02) CI [-0.15, -0.06], $p < .001$	$b = 0.09$ (0.02) CI [0.05, 0.12], $p < .001$	$b = 0.07$ (0.02) CI [0.03, 0.11], $p = .001$	$b = -0.10$ (0.02) CI [-0.14, -0.05], $p < .001$
Suppression success	$b = -0.07$ (0.02) CI [-0.12, -0.03], $p = .002$	$b = 0.04$ (0.02) CI [0.004, 0.07], $p = .027$	$b = 0.04$ (0.02) CI [-0.001, 0.08], $p = .058$	$b = -0.05$ (0.02) CI [-0.09, -0.002], $p = .040$

*Note.*  $SE$  = standard error; CI = confidence interval. All analyses were run in *R*.  $bs$  are unstandardized multilevel modeling coefficients, with  $SEs$  appearing in parentheses. For all analyses, we also controlled for diary day and the wave in which the data were collected to account for potential differences due to time or political events. For any analysis with a measure of emotion regulation success (e.g., reappraisal success), the corresponding measure of regulation attempts (e.g., reappraisal attempts) was also included in the model. The between- and within-person effects for a given predictor was always included in the same model, and each predictor was considered separately. Significant values are bolded. CIs are 95% intervals.

action (within-person effect). In contrast, successful use of reappraisal was associated with *less* motivation to take daily political action, and we found evidence for a mediational pathway: Using reappraisal more successfully was associated with lower negative emotion and, in turn, less motivation to take political action, both between and within individuals (see Figure 4, for results, and see online Supplemental Materials, for detailed statistics).

**Robustness.** Given that this study focuses on individual differences in emotion regulation predicting downstream outcomes, we also controlled for several sociocultural individual difference variables also known to predict emotion, well-being, and political action (i.e., age, gender, income, ethnicity). The associations between reappraisal success, negative emotion, well-being, and political action all held when controlling for these variables (see online Supplemental Materials).

**The Role of Political Orientation.** We examined whether political orientation moderated any of the associations for the indirect pathway between reappraisal success and negative emotion on one hand, and between negative emotion and well-being or political action on the other hand. We found no consistent evidence for moderations on these pathways across any of the different outcome measures at either the between- or within-person level, for either party or ideology (see online Supplemental Materials). Overall, these analyses suggest that this indirect pathway functions similarly for individuals across the political spectrum and could thus reflect more fundamental processes that do not hinge on political perspectives. However, given the relatively small sample of Republicans ( $n = 69$ ) in the present sample, the lack of moderation may have been due to a lack of statistical power—a limitation we address in Study 2.

### Study 1: Discussion

Using a daily diary methodology, we demonstrated that daily political events consistently evoke negative emotional reactions in the public. In turn, feeling more negative about politics corresponded to lower levels of daily psychological and physical well-being. We found evidence for this pattern when considering how people differ from each other (e.g., feeling more upset about politics on average was linked with worse daily well-being) but also when

considering how people differ day-to-day (e.g., feeling more upset about politics on a particular day was linked with worse well-being on that day). As reported in the online Supplemental Materials, we also found evidence for this pattern across different negative emotions, though we also note that some emotions had stronger effect sizes (e.g., anger was more strongly linked greater political action; Lambert et al., 2019).

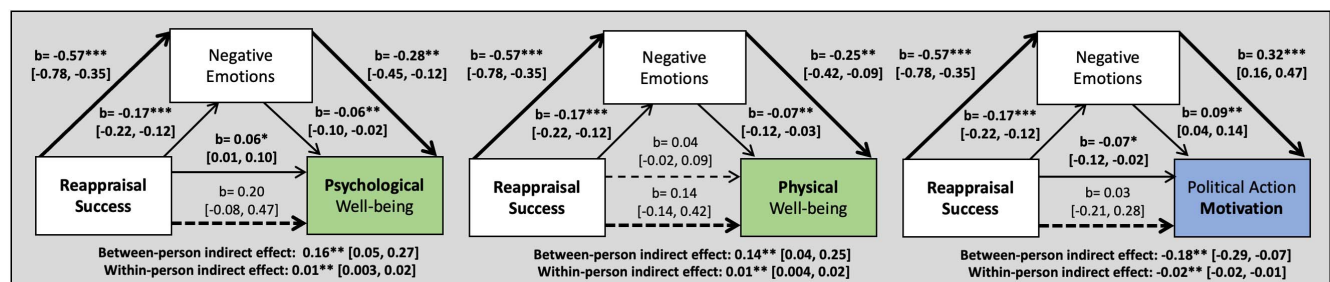
We also found that people recruited a variety of strategies to regulate their unpleasant politics-induced emotions. Successful cognitive reappraisal, in particular, was the strategy that most consistently corresponded to lower negative emotional experience and greater well-being. Yet, our results point to a fundamental trade-off that comes with this strategy: Although reappraisal corresponded to higher levels of well-being, it also corresponded with a decreased likelihood of engaging in action aimed at changing the political system that evoked the negative emotions in the first place. These findings suggest that individuals may disengage from politics not (only) due to apathy or burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015), but (also)—consistent with our theoretical model—due to a self-protecting use of emotion regulation.

### Study 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend Study 1 in several crucial ways. As in Study 1, each day we assessed participants' politics-induced emotions, psychological and physical well-being, and motivation to take political action, as well as the different emotion regulation strategies they used to cope with the emotions they experienced. However, in Study 2, we substantially increased our sample size ( $N = 811$ ) and collected data over 3 weeks rather than 2 weeks. All data were collected concurrently over the same 3 weeks in late 2019 during which a number of day-to-day political events occurred (most notably, the impeachment investigation of Donald Trump). This methodological approach resulted in a much larger number of diaries (12,790 in total), affording us more statistical power to explore both the within- and between-person effects of politics on the average American. Furthermore, because the data were collected among a larger, more diverse group of people and over a longer period of time, we increased the likelihood of

**Figure 4**

*Study 1 Statistical Mediation Analyses*



*Note.* This figure depicts study 1 statistical mediation analyses estimating the indirect effects between successfully using reappraisal, daily negative emotional responses to politics, and in turn, psychological well-being (left side), physical well-being (center), and political action motivation (right side). Between-person effects are depicted on the outer paths (thick line), and within-person effects are depicted on the inner paths (thin line). Significant paths are solid and nonsignificant lines are dashed. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

capturing more political action behaviors—beyond participants' behavioral intentions.

Additionally, in Study 2, we expanded our recruitment to include not only just Democrats and Republicans, but also those affiliated with another political party or no party. Furthermore, we recruited more broadly by not only focusing on people who thought about politics on a daily basis (a recruitment criterion for Study 1). As such, this sample was more representative of the American population, helping the study's results to be more generalizable. Relatedly, making our sample more politically diverse while also increasing statistical power meant we were better able to explore the possible moderating effects of political orientation.

Last, in Study 2, we explored a potential means for overcoming the trade-off of emotion regulation, whereby the use of emotion regulation strategies like reappraisal help people maintain well-being in the face of political stress but also minimize their likelihood of engaging in political action. In particular, we measured an alternative approach to one's emotions about politics: accepting one's emotions. *Emotional acceptance* involves acknowledging and bringing awareness to one's negative emotions as well as treating emotions as normal responses to difficult situations without judging or attempting to avoid or change those emotions (Segal et al., 2004). Acceptance aims to change one's relationship with negative emotions, rather than focusing on reducing the emotions (Segal et al., 2004). Importantly, past research finds that using acceptance promotes better psychological or physical health (Ford et al., 2018; Shallcross et al., 2010). As such, we would expect that those who successfully use acceptance in response to the unpleasant emotions of daily politics would experience higher levels of well-being. However, because the aim of acceptance is *not* to reduce the experience of one's emotions, and because acceptance may even help people to act in accordance with their values (Hayes et al., 2005), using acceptance to address one's politics-induced emotions might not weaken the motivations to take action.

## Study 2: Methods

**Participants.** We again collected sufficient data (i.e., at least 85 observations) to detect a small effect at both levels of our multilevel models. Our final sample consisted of 12,790 total observations from 811 adult American residents recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (58% women, 80% White,  $M_{\text{age}} = 37$  years;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11$  years). Participants were eligible for the study if they were comfortable using a smartphone app to participate. We aimed to recruit relatively evenly across Republicans (30% of sample), Democrats (43% of sample), and those affiliated with another political party or no party, henceforth referred to as "independents" (27% of sample). See [online Supplemental Materials](#), for information regarding participant payment, response rates, missing data, and data quality checks.

**Measures.** During each daily survey, participants reported their psychological and physical well-being, negative emotion, emotion regulation, emotional acceptance, and political action. These items are largely identical to the items included in Study 1, and we describe any specific differences below. We also note that we changed the response scale for all daily questionnaire items in Study 2 from the scale used in Study 1. Instead of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), we used a response scale of 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). By equating the lowest point of the scale with an absolute value ("not at all"), this revised scale enhances the interpretability of mean level variables

(e.g., being "not at all" successful at using reappraisal). See [Table 3](#), for descriptive statistics.

**Psychological and Physical Well-Being.** We assessed psychological well-being using the same four items from Study 1.<sup>7</sup> Physical well-being was measured each day using the two items from Study 1 ("I felt tired or fatigued today," and "I felt sick today"), which were reverse coded, plus a new item ("How was your health today?") which was rated on a scale of 0 (*very poor*) to 5 (*excellent*), recoded to a 0–6 scale,<sup>8</sup> and averaged with the other items to form a composite.

**Negative Emotional Responses to Politics.** Like Study 1, participants were asked to describe a specific political event that they had been thinking about. To encourage participants to report any type of event (e.g., positive or negative), this prompt was intentionally phrased to be neutral ("what U.S. political event or situation have you been thinking about today? (e.g., the current impeachment investigation of Donald Trump, a politician's recent public statement, a new policy being debated in congress) ..."). Participants then indicated whether the event they described involved any of the following: *The impeachment, The 2020 election, Donald Trump, U.S.'s relationship with other countries, governmental policies or laws, and other*. See [online Supplemental Materials](#), for more information about the types of events. It is worth noting that although Study 2 was collected during the impeachment investigation, less than half of participants' daily events involved the impeachment, indicating that this study also tapped into a broader political context.

Participants then rated the negative emotions they felt in response to the event using five items that each included a list of adjectives describing anger ("angry, irritated, annoyed"), fear ("scared, fearful, afraid"), disgust ("disgust, distaste, revulsion"), sadness ("sad, downhearted, unhappy"), and outrage ("morally outraged"), which were averaged together to make a single composite. We also examined each emotion separately—these results paralleled the negative emotion composite and appear in the [online Supplemental Materials](#).

**Emotion Regulation.** Participants reported their use of three emotion regulation strategies (reappraisal, distraction, suppression) using the same items as Study 1.

**Emotional Acceptance.** Participants also reported how hard they tried to engage in acceptance ("Today I tried to acknowledge and be open to my feelings about politics, without controlling or changing those feelings") and how successfully they engaged in acceptance ("Today, I was successful at acknowledging and being open to my feelings about politics, without controlling or changing those feelings"). These face-valid items were generated to reflect the field's current consensus that emotional acceptance is an active process that involves both attending to and nonjudgmentally accepting one's emotional experiences (Segal et al., 2004).

**Political Action.** We assessed motivation to engage in political action with the same item as Study 1. We also measured whether participants engaged in any political action behaviors that day using a

<sup>7</sup> As in Study 1, we examined separate composites for the "satisfied" and "purpose" items (i.e., a well-being composite) and the "stress" and "depressed" items (i.e., an ill-being composite) to ensure that the pattern of results was not being driven by either the positive or negatively-framed items. Results for these two composites closely mirrored those found when the four items formed a single composite (see [SOM](#) for details).

<sup>8</sup> To keep the physical well-being measure on the same 0–6 scale as the other measures from Study 2 and thereby maximize comparability across scales, we applied a linear transformation to this one 0–5 item to put it on a 0–6 scale (i.e., 0 = 0, 1 = 1.2, 2 = 2.4, 3 = 3.6, 4 = 4.8, 5 = 6).

**Table 3**  
*Study 2 Descriptive Statistics for All Core Study Variables*

Study variable	<i>M</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	ICC	Reliability ( $\omega$ ) for composite measures	
			Within ( $\omega^w$ )	Between ( $\omega^b$ )
Negative emotion composite	1.70 (0.04)	.40	.90; 95% CI [.89, .90]	.79; 95% CI [.77, .81]
Emotion regulation strategies				
Reappraisal success	2.38 (0.05)	.49	—	—
Distraction success	2.66 (0.06)	.46	—	—
Suppression success	2.17 (0.06)	.55	—	—
Daily outcomes				
Psychological well-being	4.02 (0.04)	.66	.74; 95% CI [.73, .74]	.85; 95% CI [.83, .86]
Physical well-being	4.30 (0.03)	.54	.63; 95% CI [.62, .64]	.62; 95% CI [.58, .65]
Political action motivation	0.51 (0.03)	.49	—	—

*Note.* *SE* = standard error; ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Response scale for all core study variables was 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). Means reflect the intercept values from multilevel models with a random intercept to account for the nested nature of the data. ICCs are calculated for the null model. For composite measures, we calculated reliability composites at both the within- and between-person levels. 95% CIs were calculated using Monte Carlo simulations.

binary (*yes, no*) variable, with a follow-up question where they could briefly describe their action. We again focus primarily on motivation to take action within this investigation, as it represents a reliable and valid predictor of future political action in prior research, can be validly assessed every day, and allows for more direct comparability across our two studies. However, because Study 2 was better designed to capture action (with a much larger sample size and more diaries per person), we also report analyses for political action behaviors.

There are a few noteworthy features about these behaviors: First, although behaviors were assessed on a daily level, the data were highly zero-inflated: On the daily level, action behaviors were reported in 252 diaries (or ~2%) of 12,790 total diaries. On the between-person level, ~79% of people engaged in no political action behaviors, ~15% of people engaged in one behavior, and ~6% of people engaged in two or more behaviors. Based on this highly skewed distribution (and given that logistic multilevel models and zero-inflated models either did not converge or gave impossible values), we adopted a more parsimonious between-person level of analysis for the political action behavior measures by recoding daily level political action into a binary between-person variable reflecting whether participants engaged in any action over the study or not.

Additionally, the base rates for action were somewhat higher in Study 2 than Study 1, likely reflecting the longer study duration: 26% of people reported engaging in action across the 21 days, as compared to 17% across the 14 days in Study 1. In combination with the much larger sample size in Study 2, these base rates translate into a greater number of people who engaged in action during Study 2 ( $n = 210$ ) compared to Study 1 ( $n = 34$ ). With these larger numbers, we were also able to consider more stringent criteria for political action based on the open-ended responses participants provided: Of the 210 people who reported political action behaviors, 36 of these people reported behaviors that could be conceptualized as relatively casual (e.g., consuming news media, having conversations with friends). Below, we report results for both the full set of political actions as well as for a more stringent measure of action that does not include the casual behaviors.

Last, these data provide a unique opportunity to validate the measure of action motivation. Indeed, greater motivation to take political action significantly predicted whether someone engaged in political action behaviors during the study, both when considering

the full set of behaviors, *odds ratio*: 2.45,  $p < .001$ , or the stringent measure of behaviors, *odds ratio*: 2.16,  $p < .001$ .

**Political Orientation.** During a baseline survey, a single item assessed participants' political party and a single item assessed their general political ideology on a scale from 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative*),  $M = 3.52$  ( $SD = 1.87$ ).

### Procedure

Participants completed the background survey which included measures of demographics, political party, and political ideology, as well as other trait measures not relevant to the present investigation. The background survey was available between November 8, 2019, and November 12, 2019. Participants then downloaded the smartphone app to complete the daily surveys (ExperienceSampler; Thai & Page-Gould, 2018). On November 12, 2019, participants received a notification on their phone at 8 p.m. (their local time) that their first survey was ready and participants had until midnight that same night to complete the survey (a reminder notification was sent at 10 p.m.). Daily surveys were administered nightly for 3 weeks, beginning on November 12, 2019, and ending on December 2, 2019. Each daily survey began with participants reporting their daily psychological and physical well-being. Participants then reported their emotional responses to the specific political event that they had been thinking about that day, how they regulated those emotional responses, their use of emotional acceptance, and how motivated they were to engage in political action as well as if they engaged in action behaviors. In addition, several other variables not relevant to the present hypotheses were collected in the daily measures (e.g., media consumption, relationship measures) and are not discussed further.

**General Analytic Strategy.** The same multilevel modeling strategy as Study 1 was used to test the associations between emotion, emotion regulation, well-being, and political action.

### Study 2: Results

**How Are People Responding to Politics in Daily Life?** Results again indicated that day-to-day political events commonly evoke negative emotional reactions: People felt at least some degree of any negative emotion (i.e., above the lowest scale point) on 75% of the

days and felt stronger levels of any negative emotion (i.e., at or above the scale midpoint) on 53% of the days.

**Do Negative Emotions About Politics Predict Worse Well-Being?** Replicating Study 1, stronger negative emotional responses to politics were associated with worse psychological and physical well-being at the between- and within-person levels (Table 4).

#### How Are People Protecting Their Emotions in Daily Life?

When considering emotion regulation *attempts*, people were again commonly motivated to regulate the emotions they felt in response to day-to-day political events: People attempted reappraisal at least somewhat on 55% of the days, attempted distraction on 56% of the days, and attempted suppression on 34% of the days.<sup>9</sup>

When considering emotion regulation *success*, replicating Study 1, using emotion regulation more successfully was in turn associated with lower negative emotional responses to politics for all strategies, at the between- and within-person levels (see the top half of Table 4, for statistics). To examine each strategy's *unique* associations with lower negative emotion, all three strategies were entered simultaneously to predict negative emotion in response to daily political events (Table 4, bottom half). At the between-person level, replicating Study 1, only people who more successfully used reappraisal—but not the other strategies—were less likely to experience negative emotions in response to politics (to a marginal degree). At the within-person level, unlike in Study 1 where only reappraisal remained a significant predictor, all three strategies uniquely predicted negative emotion: When participants were particularly successful at using reappraisal or distraction on a given day, they experienced lower negative emotion; and when participants were particularly successful at using suppression on a given day, they experienced somewhat greater negative emotional responses to politics, consistent with the potential backfiring effects of expressive suppression (Goldin et al., 2008). Because each strategy uniquely predicted negative emotional responses to politics, in the following analyses, we focus on models that simultaneously consider each strategy's unique effects (for nonsimultaneous models, see Table 4, top half).

**Through Lower Negative Emotion, Does Emotion Regulation Predict Better Daily Well-Being?** Replicating Study 1, successfully using reappraisal was uniquely associated with better psychological and physical well-being at the between- and within-person levels (Table 4). Additionally, successfully using distraction was uniquely associated with better psychological and physical well-being, but only at the within-person level. Building on these results, we found evidence for a mediational pathway between reappraisal and well-being such that successfully using reappraisal was associated with lower negative emotion and, in turn, greater psychological and physical well-being, both between and within individuals (see Figure 5, Panel A, left and center). A similar mediational pathway was supported for the link between distraction and well-being, at the within-person level (see Figure 5, Panel B, left and center). We also found evidence for a mediational pathway for suppression whereby it was associated with greater negative emotion and in turn, worse well-being (see online Supplemental Materials, for all detailed mediation statistics).

**Through Lower Negative Emotion, Does Emotion Regulation Predict Less Political Action?** As in Study 1, although negative emotion was linked with worse well-being, it was also linked with greater motivation to engage in political action at the between- and within-person levels (Table 4). In contrast, successful use of reappraisal and distraction was associated with less motivation to take

political action: When people used reappraisal or distraction more successfully on a given day than they typically did, they were less motivated to engage in political action. Building on these results, we found evidence for a mediational pathway between reappraisal and political action such that successfully using reappraisal was associated with lower negative emotion and, in turn, less political action, both between-individuals (marginally) and within-individuals (significantly; see Figure 5, Panel A, right side). A similar mediational pathway was supported for the link between distraction and lower political action, at the within-person level (see Figure 5, Panel B, right side).

**Robustness.** Again, given that this study focuses on individual differences in emotion regulation predicting downstream outcomes, we controlled for several sociocultural individual difference variables also known to predict emotion, well-being, and political action (i.e., age, gender, income, ethnicity). All associations between reappraisal success, negative emotion, well-being, and political action held (see online Supplemental Materials).

**Political Action Behaviors.** Given that some participants in Study 2 also engaged in behavioral political action during the 3-week span, we were able to validate the measure of motivation to take action and examine the predictors of behavioral action (assessed on the between-person level, see Methods, for more details). First, greater motivation to take political action significantly predicted whether someone engaged in political action behaviors in daily life, whether considering the full set of reported action behaviors, *odds ratio*: 2.45,  $p < .001$ , or a more stringent measure of action behaviors, *odds ratio*: 2.16,  $p < .001$ , thereby validating the motivational measure. Second, people who experienced greater negative emotional responses to politics in daily life were indeed more likely to engage in political action behavior whether considering the full set of behaviors, *odds ratio*: 1.33,  $p < .001$ , or the stringent measure of behaviors, *odds ratio*: 1.32,  $p < .001$ . Third, we again found evidence for the between-person mediational pathway between reappraisal and lower political action such that people who more successfully used reappraisal on average experienced lower negative emotion and, in turn, were less likely to engage in political action behavior, *indirect effect* predicting full set of behaviors =  $-0.03$ , 95% CI [ $-0.05$ ,  $-0.01$ ],  $SE = 0.01$ , *indirect effect* predicting stringent measure of behaviors =  $-0.03$ , 95% CI [ $-0.05$ ,  $-0.01$ ],  $SE = 0.01$ .

**Emotional Acceptance.** We next explored whether emotional acceptance represents a viable alternative approach to ones' emotions about politics that may help people feel better without coming at a cost to political action. We found that acceptance was a commonly used approach in daily life: Participants attempted to accept their emotional responses to at least some degree on 63% of the days. Consistent with theorizing that accepting one's emotions may not immediately alleviate negative emotion, acceptance did not uniquely predict negative emotion at the between-person level,  $b = 0.04$ , 95% CI [ $-0.07$ ,  $0.15$ ],  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .490$ , or the within-person level,  $b = 0.01$ , 95% CI [ $-0.01$ ,  $0.03$ ],  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .263$ , when controlling for the other regulation strategies people used on a given day. However, successfully accepting one's emotions about

<sup>9</sup> These percentages are notably lower than the percentages from Study 1, which is likely due to the change in the response scale in Study 2 (e.g., switching from a *disagree-agree* scale to a *not at all-extremely* scale; see Study 2 methods for more details), rather than any major substantive difference in people's emotion regulation motives across studies.

**Table 4**

*Study 2 Multilevel Model Analyses Testing the Between- and Within-Person Association Between Negative Emotion or Emotion Regulation Success and the Daily Outcomes*

Predictors	Negative emotion	Well-being		
		Psychological	Physical	Political action motivation
Separate analyses for each predictor				
Between-person associations				
Negative emotion	—	$b = -0.20$ (0.03) CI [-0.27, -0.13], $p < .001$	$b = -0.22$ (0.03) CI [-0.27, -0.17], $p < .001$	$b = 0.19$ (0.03) CI [0.14, 0.24], $p < .001$
Reappraisal success	$b = -0.14$ (0.03) CI [-0.19, -0.08], $p < .001$	$b = 0.15$ (0.03) CI [0.09, 0.21], $p < .001$	$b = 0.09$ (0.03) CI [0.04, 0.14], $p < .001$	$b = -0.03$ (0.02) CI [-0.07, 0.01], $p = .190$
Distraction success	$b = -0.10$ (0.03) CI [-0.15, -0.05], $p < .001$	$b = 0.10$ (0.03) CI [0.04, 0.15], $p < .001$	$b = 0.03$ (0.02) CI [-0.01, 0.08], $p = .150$	$b = -0.04$ (0.02) CI [-0.09, -0.003], $p = .037$
Suppression success	$b = -0.07$ (0.02) CI [-0.12, -0.02], $p = .004$	$b = 0.05$ (0.03) CI [0.003, 0.11], $p = .036$	$b = 0.03$ (0.02) CI [-0.01, 0.07], $p = .104$	$b = -0.05$ (0.02) CI [-0.09, -0.01], $p = .007$
Within-person associations				
Negative emotion	—	$b = -0.06$ (0.01) CI [-0.07, -0.05], $p < .001$	$b = -0.03$ (0.01) CI [-0.04, -0.02], $p < .001$	$b = 0.05$ (0.01) CI [0.04, 0.06], $p < .001$
Reappraisal success	$b = -0.13$ (0.01) CI [-0.14, -0.11], $p < .001$	$b = 0.04$ (0.01) CI [0.03, 0.05], $p < .001$	$b = 0.04$ (0.01) CI [0.03, 0.05], $p < .001$	$b = -0.02$ (0.01) CI [-0.03, -0.01], $p < .001$
Distraction success	$b = -0.12$ (0.01) CI [-0.13, -0.10], $p < .001$	$b = 0.04$ (0.01) CI [0.03, 0.05], $p < .001$	$b = 0.03$ (0.01) CI [0.02, 0.04], $p < .001$	$b = -0.03$ (0.01) CI [-0.04, -0.02], $p < .001$
Suppression success	$b = -0.03$ (0.01) CI [-0.05, -0.02], $p < .001$	$b = 0.02$ (0.01) CI [0.01, 0.03], $p < .001$	$b = 0.01$ (0.01) CI [0.002, 0.02], $p = .018$	$b = -0.01$ (0.01) CI [-0.03, -0.004], $p = .007$
Simultaneous analysis with all strategies				
Between-person associations				
Reappraisal success	$b = -0.09$ (0.05) CI [-0.19, 0.01], $p = .082$	$b = 0.15$ (0.05) CI [0.05, 0.25], $p = .003$	$b = 0.12$ (0.04) CI [0.04, 0.20], $p = .004$	$b = 0.06$ (0.04) CI [-0.01, 0.14], $p = .108$
Distraction success	$b = -0.04$ (0.05) CI [-0.13, 0.06], $p = .442$	$b = 0.05$ (0.05) CI [-0.05, 0.15], $p = .341$	$b = -0.06$ (0.04) CI [-0.14, 0.03], $p = .179$	$b = -0.02$ (0.04) CI [-0.09, 0.06], $p = .680$
Suppression success	$b = 0.0004$ (0.04) CI [-0.08, 0.08], $p = .992$	$b = -0.07$ (0.04) CI [-0.16, 0.01], $p = .095$	$b = 0.0004$ (0.04) CI [-0.07, 0.07], $p = .991$	$b = -0.08$ (0.03) CI [-0.15, -0.02], $p = .013$
Within-person associations				
Reappraisal success	$b = -0.10$ (0.01) CI [-0.12, -0.08], $p < .001$	$b = 0.03$ (0.01) CI [0.02, 0.04], $p < .001$	$b = 0.04$ (0.01) CI [0.02, 0.05], $p < .001$	$b = -0.01$ (0.01) CI [-0.03, -0.002], $p = .024$
Distraction success	$b = -0.09$ (0.01) CI [-0.11, -0.07], $p < .001$	$b = 0.03$ (0.01) CI [0.02, 0.05], $p < .001$	$b = 0.02$ (0.01) CI [0.01, 0.03], $p = .002$	$b = -0.02$ (0.01) CI [-0.03, -0.01], $p < .001$
Suppression success	$b = 0.02$ (0.01) CI [0.005, 0.04], $p = .012$	$b = -0.001$ (0.01) CI [-0.01, 0.01], $p = .876$	$b = -0.002$ (0.01) CI [-0.01, 0.01], $p = .771$	$b = -0.003$ (0.01) CI [-0.01, 0.01], $p = .640$

*Note.* SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. *bs* are unstandardized multilevel modeling coefficients, with *SEs* appearing in parentheses. CIs were bootstrapped with 5,000 resamples. All analyses also controlled for diary day. For any analysis with a measure of emotion regulation success (e.g., reappraisal success), the corresponding measure of regulation effort (e.g., reappraisal attempts) was also included in the model. The between- and within-person effects for a given predictor were always included in the same model. First, each predictor was analyzed separately (top half of table), and then the three emotion regulation strategies were analyzed simultaneously to examine their unique effects. Significant values are bolded; marginal values are bolded and italicized.

politics uniquely predicted greater psychological and physical well-being on the between-person level, marginally ( $b_{\text{psych}} = 0.11$ , 95% CI [-0.001, 0.23],  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .056$ , and  $b_{\text{physical}} = 0.08$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.17],  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .098$ ) and on the within-person level, significantly ( $b_{\text{psych}} = 0.01$ , 95% CI [0.001, 0.03],  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .029$  and  $b_{\text{physical}} = 0.01$ , 95% CI [0.001, 0.03],  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .034$ ). Moreover, successfully accepting one's emotions about politics did not jeopardize motivation to take political action at either the between-person level ( $b = 0.05$ , 95% CI [-0.04, 0.14],  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .272$ ) or the within-person level ( $b = 0.004$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.02],  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .522$ ), suggesting acceptance may be a useful means for protecting oneself from the stress of daily politics without impairing motivation to take action.

**The Role of Political Orientation.** We examined whether political orientation moderated any of the associations for the indirect pathway between reappraisal or distraction success and negative emotion on one hand, and between negative emotion and well-being or political action on the other hand. We found no

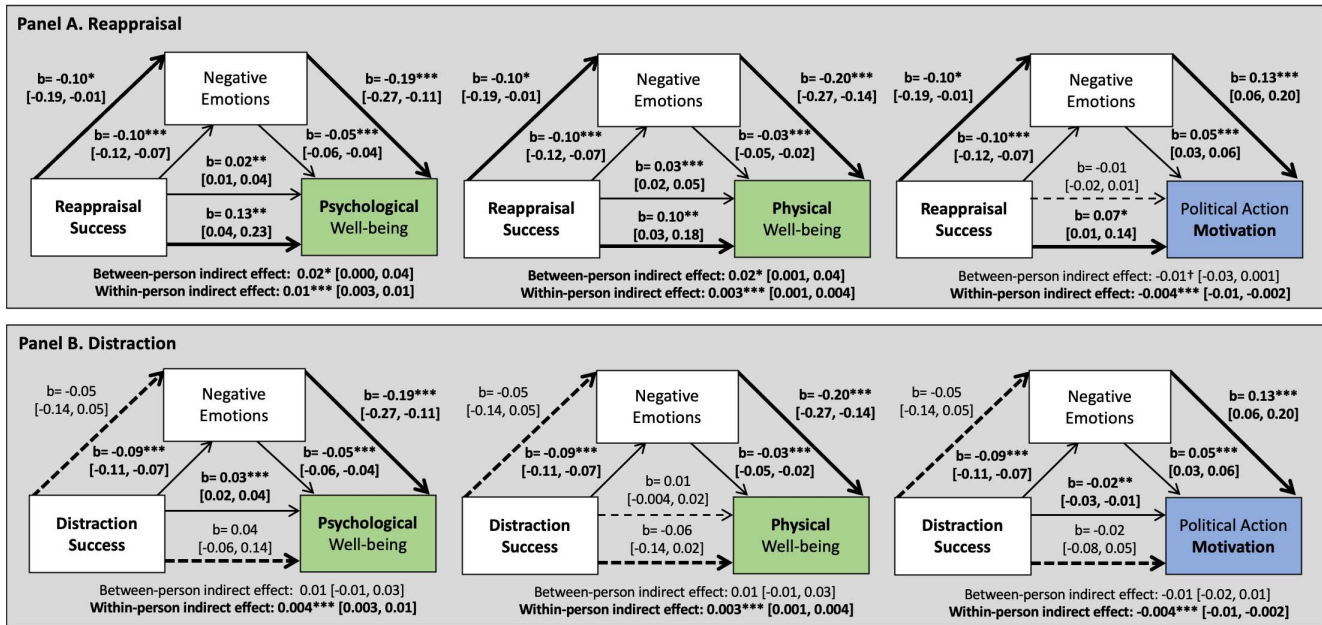
consistent evidence for moderations on these pathways across any of the outcome measures at either the between- or within-person level, for either party or ideology (see [online Supplemental Materials](#)), with one exception: On the between- and within-person levels, the link between negative emotion and motivation to engage in political action was stronger for Republicans compared to either Democrats or independents, but the association between negative emotion and political action remained significant for all three groups (and we note that this effect does not replicate when political ideology is the moderator). Overall, these analyses largely replicate Study 1 and suggest that this indirect pathway functions similarly for individuals across the political spectrum and could thus reflect more fundamental processes that do not hinge on political views.

### Study 2: Discussion

In Study 2, in a politically diverse sample of Americans, we once again found that participants consistently experienced politically

Figure 5

Study 2 Statistical Mediation Analyses



*Note.* This figure depicts study 2 statistical mediation analyses estimating the indirect effects between successfully using reappraisal (Panel A) or distraction (Panel B), daily negative emotional responses to politics, and in turn, psychological well-being (left side), physical well-being (center), and political action motivation (right side). Between-person effects are depicted on the outer paths (thick line), and within-person effects are depicted on the inner paths (thin line). Significant paths are solid, and nonsignificant lines are dashed. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

$^\dagger p < .10$ .  $^* p < .05$ .  $^{**} p < .01$ .  $^{***} p < .001$ .

induced negative emotions. These negative emotions, in turn, corresponded to worse well-being, both at the between- and within-person levels. At the same time, these negative emotions—examined both as a composite and as discrete states (see [online Supplemental Materials](#))—also corresponded to greater motivation to engage in political action (at the within- and between-person levels) and greater likelihood of actually engaging in action during the 3 weeks of the study. In addition, to cope with the political emotions they were feeling, people frequently used all three of the emotion regulation strategies we measured, and successfully using these strategies corresponded to greater psychological and physical well-being. Successfully using both reappraisal and distraction independently corresponded to greater well-being (at both the within- and between-person levels for reappraisal, and just at the within-person level for distraction). Yet, these two emotion regulation strategies also corresponded to less motivation to take political action (with reappraisal also corresponding to less engagement in political behavior). Thus, these findings once again point to the trade-off that arises when individuals effectively use emotion regulation to decrease their experience of negative political emotions: greater personal well-being and but less action. We underscore here that we have begun our examination by *observing* how these processes unfold in people's daily lives and as such, although these data are consistent with the directional theoretical model we have proposed, they are correlational and may also reflect bidirectional associations (see Studies 3 and 4 for experimental evidence, and the General Discussion section for more on alternative directionalities).

In Study 2, we also measured emotional acceptance as a possible avenue for overcoming the trade-off between protecting oneself from the stress of politics and engaging in political action. We found that successfully using emotional acceptance corresponded to higher levels of well-being but did not predict less political action. Although null results should always be interpreted with caution, given the large sample size ( $N = 811$ ) and even larger set of within-person assessment points (12,790), these null results are likely informative. In sum, these results suggest that like reappraisal and distraction, acceptance may promote greater well-being, but unlike reappraisal and distraction, acceptance may not interfere with participants' motivation to engage in political action.

## Part II

In Part I, two daily diary studies—including over 1,000 participants and nearly 15,000 diaries—provided compelling evidence for the daily costs of politics and the daily trade-offs of using emotion regulation to manage emotions about politics. The daily diary paradigm is an important method for studying how processes unfold in daily life and the results from Part I are consistent with our proposed directional theoretical model. However, because these diary data are correlational, we could not be certain if daily politics was *causing* elevated negative emotional responses or if daily emotion regulation used in the face of politics was *causing* reduced negative emotional responses. To complement Part I and directly test for causation, therefore, we now present Part II, where we used experimental methods in well-powered samples. In Study 3

( $N = 922$ ), we examined whether exposing participants to daily politics (vs. a neutral control) would cause greater negative emotion, and in turn, worse well-being but greater motivation for political action. In Study 4 ( $N = 1,277$ ), we examined whether using emotion regulation (vs. a no-regulation control) would minimize the experience of negative emotions for participants exposed to daily politics, and in turn predict better well-being but less motivation for political action.

To conduct these experimental studies, we strove to emulate the experience of being exposed to daily politics, while still using a standardized stimulus set that could be presented to all participants. Given that television remains a primary source of political content in the United States (Katz, 2021), we chose to present participants with a clip of recent daily political news from one of the top-rated news sources on television. We wanted to show people the type of news that would be typical of their daily life. Because people are exposed to different daily political sources depending on their political leanings, we chose two different news sources: We collected stimuli to show Democrats from the highest rated liberal-leaning news source (*The Rachel Maddow Show*; Katz, 2021) and collected stimuli to show Republicans from the highest conservative-leaning news source (*Tucker Carlson Tonight*; Katz, 2021). People who identified with a different political party or no party were randomly assigned to either clip. We prepiloted clips from these shows to identify clips that were viewed as comparably political, were typical of daily life, and had evocative content. The final selected clips were also comparable in content and originally aired only 1 day apart. To ensure we were presenting people with timely political content—as people would consume in daily life—we orchestrated our data collection procedure to minimize the time between the original air date and our studies: All pilot data and Studies 3 and 4 data were collected within 1–1.5 weeks of the original air date of the show.

To ensure the results of Part II would be as directly comparable to Part I as possible, we assessed the same negative emotions as in Study 2, the same markers of well-being, and the same marker of political action motivation. Because motivation was only assessed with a single item in Part I, we expanded our assessment of political action in Part II to also include people's likelihood of engaging in a variety of future collective actions (e.g., attending demonstrations) as well as likelihood of future individual actions (e.g., having conversations about politics). Like Part I, Part II allowed us to examine the possible moderating role of political orientation in our observed effects.

## Study 3

### Study 3: Methods

**Participants.** An a priori power analysis (G\*Power; Faul et al., 2007) indicated that 795 participants would be sufficient to detect a small effect ( $d = 0.20$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ,  $1 - \beta = .80$ ) in a two-cell between-person design. We overrecruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to account for a priori exclusions and collected an initial sample of 991 participants. In addition to the data quality measures described in the online Supplemental Materials, on an a priori basis, we first excluded participants who did not pass or complete an attention check at the end of the study ( $n = 52$ , 5% of the sample), then those who took more than three times the median length above the median of the survey to complete the study ( $n = 15$ , 2%), and then those who reported having audiovisual issues that significantly impaired their ability to watch and/or hear the video clip ( $n = 2$ , 0.2%). The final

sample comprised data from 922 U.S. participants, 51% women, 79% White,  $M(SD)_{\text{age}} = 42(13)$  years. We aimed to recruit roughly even samples of Democrats (36%), Republicans (32%), and people who identified as independent or endorsed the "other" option (32%). Participants received \$2.00 for participation.

**Measures.** Unless otherwise noted, Study 3 used the same 0–6 scales as Study 2. See online Supplemental Materials, for all study materials.

**Exposure to Daily Politics.** We selected two experimental political clips (one that was liberal-leaning and one that was conservative-leaning) with a multistep method: First, for seven consecutive weekdays, the research team watched the most-viewed liberal and conservative political talk shows (*The Rachel Maddow Show* and *Tucker Carlson Tonight*). Within this pool of broadcasts, we identified four Maddow clips and four Carlson clips that were self-contained (i.e., the content of the clip was clear without watching the full broadcast) to pilot test and evaluate on three key a priori metrics: the degree to which the clips (a) focused on politics, (b) represented typical daily politics, and (c) dealt with evocative issues.

The four Maddow clips were pretested among a pilot sample of Democrats ( $N = 55$ ), and the four Carlson clips were pilot tested among a sample of Republicans ( $N = 51$ ) on November 15 and 16, 2021. Consistent with our goals, we identified one Maddow clip and one Carlson clip that were both rated as strongly focused on politics, that is, ratings well-above the midpoint of the 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*completely*) scale:  $M(SD)_{\text{Maddow}} = 4.45(1.50)$ ,  $M(SD)_{\text{Carlson}} = 4.18(1.53)$ , and were comparable to each other,  $t(104) < 1$ ,  $p = .348$ . The two clips were also both rated as very typical of modern politics,  $M(SD)_{\text{Maddow}} = 3.89(1.61)$ ;  $M(SD)_{\text{Carlson}} = 4.25(1.55)$ , and were comparable to each other,  $t(104) = 1.19$ ,  $p = .238$ . Both clips also induced significant negative emotion compared to emotion assessed before the clips,  $M(SD)_{\text{post-Maddow}} = 3.30(1.57)$ ;  $M(SD)_{\text{pre-Maddow}} = 1.00(1.28)$ ;  $M(SD)_{\text{post-Carlson}} = 3.41(1.91)$ ;  $M(SD)_{\text{pre-Carlson}} = 0.65(0.96)$ ;  $t_s > 10.87$ ,  $p_s < .001$ , and both clips induced negative emotion to a comparable degree,  $t(104) < 1$ ,  $p = .747$ . These two clips were also comparable in their original air date and the focus of the content: The Maddow clip aired on November 11, 2021, and discussed recent violence in Austin, Texas, whereas the Carlson clip aired on November 12, 2021, and discussed recent violence in Chicago, Illinois.

In addition to the two piloted experimental clips discussed above, Study 3 included a neutral control condition discussing how to build a patio wall, which has been used as a neutral control in prior research (Stellar et al., 2015).

**Negative Emotional Responses to Politics.** Participants rated the same five negative emotions assessed in Study 2, which were averaged together into a composite ( $\alpha = .95$ ). We note that the findings observed here were comparable when also examining each specific negative emotion included in the composite (see online Supplemental Materials, for all discrete emotion analyses).

**Psychological and Physical Well-Being.** We used the same psychological and physical well-being items from Study 2 but adapted the timescale for Study 3. In Study 2's daily diary, participants rated their well-being "today," but in Study 3, they rated their well-being "right now" (e.g., Study 2: "Today, I felt satisfied with life"; Study 3: "Right now, I feel satisfied with life"). We created composites for psychological ( $\alpha = .82$ ) and physical well-being ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

**Political Action.** We adapted the same political action motivation item from Study 2 ("Right now, I feel motivated to take political

action (e.g., donate money, volunteer time, attend a protest, contact my governmental representatives).”). To expand our assessment of political action, we measured participants’ likelihood of engaging in a variety of collective political actions over the next 6 months (e.g., donating money to political organizations, contacting governmental representatives, attending political protests), which were averaged to form a collective action composite ( $\alpha = .90$ ). We also explored people’s likelihood of noncollective political action (e.g., posting about politics on social media, having political conversations, seeking out additional information about politics), which were averaged to form an individual action composite ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Political Orientation.** Participants identified their political party (*Republican, Democrat, independent, and other*) and reported their political ideology on a scale from 0 (*very liberal*) to 6 (*very conservative*).

**Procedure.** Study 3 data were collected on November 17, 2021—within 1 week of when the selected Maddow and Carlson broadcasts aired. After reporting demographics, political orientation, and completing a brief audiovisual check, participants were randomly assigned to watch one of three video clips. Participants who identified as Democrat were randomly assigned to view either the Maddow or neutral clip. Participants who identified as Republican were randomly assigned to view either the Carlson or neutral clip. Participants who identified as independent or “other” were randomly assigned to view the Maddow clip, the Carlson clip, or the control clip. Thus, Study 3 had a two-cell between-person design with the political (Maddow or Carlson video) versus neutral control video clip serving as the key manipulation. Following the video clip, participants reported their emotional responses, well-being, and political action.

### Study 3: Results

**How Does Exposure to Daily Politics Affect Negative Emotions?** A between-subject *t* test indicated that daily politics evokes negative emotional reactions to a strong degree: Participants exposed to daily politics felt much more negative emotion,  $M(SD) = 3.39(1.72)$ , compared to those in the neutral condition,  $M(SD) = 0.47(0.81)$ ,  $t(919) = 31.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = 2.17$ .

**Do Negative Emotions About Politics Predict Worse Well-Being?** Negative emotional responses to daily politics, in turn, predicted worse psychological well-being ( $r = -.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and physical well-being ( $r = -.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

A *t* test confirmed that being exposed to daily politics (vs. neutral condition) resulted in lower psychological well-being,  $M(SD) = 3.50(1.45)$  versus  $M(SD) = 4.25(1.36)$ ;  $t(920) = 7.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.53$ , and physical well-being,  $M(SD) = 4.39(1.21)$  versus  $M(SD) = 4.75(1.01)$ ;  $t(920) = 4.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.33$ . Building on these results, we used the PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2022) with 5,000 bootstrap samples to estimate the indirect effects whereby experimental condition (daily politics vs. neutral condition, entered as a categorical “X” variable) influenced negative emotion (entered as the mediator “M” variable), which in turn predicted one measure of well-being (entered as the “Y” variable). As summarized in Figure 6, in these statistical mediation models, we found significant indirect effects such that being exposed to daily politics (vs. neutral condition) resulted in greater negative emotion which was, in turn, associated with worse psychological and physical well-being.

**Do Negative Emotions About Politics Predict More Political Action?** Negative emotional responses predicted greater motivation to engage in collective political action ( $r = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as well as greater likelihood of collective action ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and greater likelihood of individual action ( $r = .15$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

A *t* test confirmed that being exposed to daily politics (vs. neutral condition) resulted in greater motivation for collective action,  $M(SD) = 1.93(1.89)$  versus  $M(SD) = 1.09(1.49)$ ;  $t(920) = 7.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.49$ , and greater likelihood of collective action,  $M(SD) = 1.25(1.50)$  versus  $M(SD) = 0.99(1.31)$ ;  $t(920) = 2.82$ ,  $p = .005$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.19$ , but not necessarily greater likelihood of individual action,  $M(SD) = 2.81(1.56)$  versus  $M(SD) = 2.82(1.49)$ ;  $t(920) < 1$ ,  $p = .887$ . Building on these results, we conducted statistical mediation analyses to estimate the indirect effects following the same procedure outlined above for the well-being analyses. As summarized in Figure 7, we found that being exposed to daily politics (vs. neutral condition) resulted in greater negative emotion which was, in turn, associated with greater political action motivation and greater likelihood of future collective action.

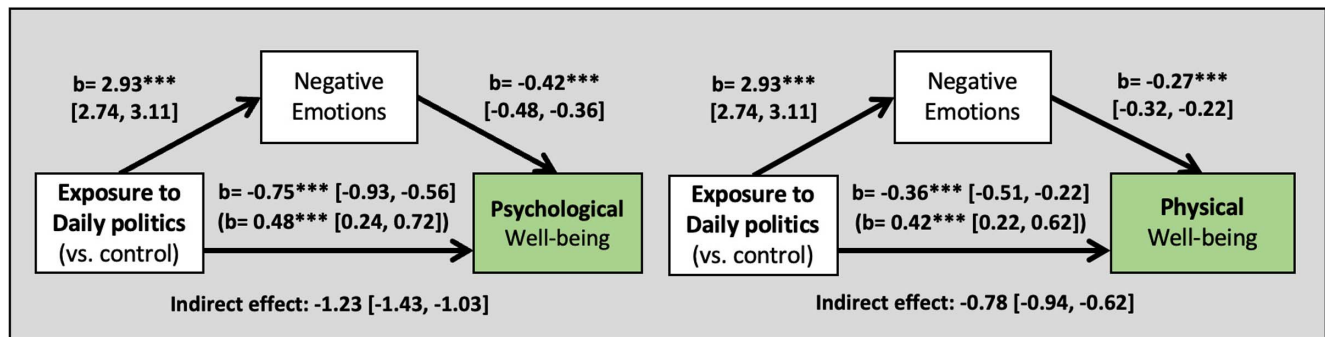
**The Role of Political Orientation.** We examined whether political orientation (party or ideology) moderated any of the associations for the indirect pathway between (a) experimental condition and negative emotion, (b) negative emotion and well-being, and (c) negative emotion and political action. We found that being exposed to daily politics resulted in significantly greater negative emotion compared to a neutral condition across political parties and political ideology, although we also found that the effect was significantly stronger for Democrats (and liberals), compared to their Republican (and conservative) counterparts. We found no consistent evidence for moderations of the link between negative emotion and any of the outcome measures (see online Supplemental Materials).

### Study 3: Discussion

Using an experimental design, we demonstrated that daily politics—portrayed through the top-watched conservative and liberal-leaning news sources—evoked potent negative emotional reactions and in turn worsened well-being (both psychological and physical) but enhanced motivation for political action. Through an expanded assessment of political action, we found that exposure to daily politics may have a stronger influence on increasing people’s motivation and likelihood of *collective* action (e.g., donating, protesting), and may play a weaker role in individual action (e.g., talking about politics, posting on social media). Replicating Studies 1 and 2, we also found that these results were comparable across specific negative emotions. These findings provide support for the causal influence of daily politics on well-being and political action, thereby complementing Studies 1 and 2’s correlational design and providing compelling causal evidence for the influence daily politics has on people from across the political spectrum.

### Study 4

In Study 4, we examined whether using emotion regulation (vs. a no-regulation control) would minimize the experience of negative emotions for participants exposed to daily politics, and in turn predict better well-being but less motivation for political action. Study 4 used a similar design as Study 3—including the same daily political stimuli and identical outcome measures—but in Study 4, all participants

**Figure 6***Study 3 Statistical Mediation Analyses Predicting Well-Being*

*Note.* This figure depicts study 3 statistical mediations examining the effect of being exposed to daily politics (vs. a neutral control condition) on negative emotional responses to politics, and estimating the indirect effects, in turn, on psychological well-being (left side) and physical well-being (right side). The  $c'$  path is included in parentheses. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

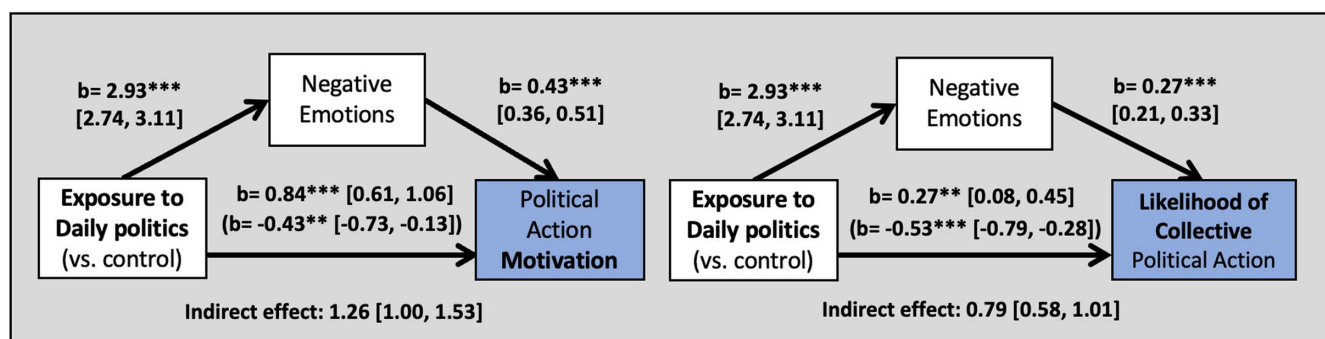
\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

watched a political stimuli clip and were asked to use an emotion regulation strategy (or a no-regulation control) when watching. We focused on three specific regulation strategies based on the results of Studies 1 and 2: (a) cognitive reappraisal, given that it showed the most consistent unique links with lower negative emotional responses to daily politics across both Studies 1 and 2; (b) distraction, given that it demonstrated comparable results to reappraisal in our more highly powered Study 2; and (c) emotional acceptance given the Study 2 results that it may provide some emotional relief without coming at a cost to downstream action. These three experimental conditions were compared to a no-regulation control where people simply responded naturally to the clips, following similar procedures as prior work (Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019).

#### Study 4: Methods

**Participants.** An a priori power analysis (G\*Power; Faul et al., 2007) indicated that 1,100 participants would be sufficient to detect

a small effect ( $d = 0.20$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ,  $1 - \beta = .80$ ) in a four-cell between-person design. We overrecruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to account for a priori exclusions and collected an initial sample of 1,433 participants. In addition to the data quality measures described in the [online Supplemental Materials](#), on an a priori basis, we first excluded those who did not pass or complete an attention check at the end of the study ( $n = 101$ , 7% of the sample), then those who gave highly off-topic responses (or did not respond at all) to a free-response attention check question embedded after the emotion regulation instructions ( $n = 20$ , 1%), then those who took more than three times the median length above the median of the survey to complete the study ( $n = 29$ , 2%), then those who reported having audiovisual issues that significantly impaired their ability to watch and/or hear the video clip ( $n = 6$ , 0.5%). The final sample comprised data from 1,277 U.S. adults, 57% women, 80% White,  $M(SD)_{age} = 42(13)$  years. We aimed to recruit roughly even samples of Democrats (35%), Republicans (32%), and people who identified as independent or with another political party (33%). Participants

**Figure 7***Study 3 Statistical Mediation Analyses Predicting Political Action*

*Note.* Study 3 statistical mediation analyses examining the effect of being exposed to daily politics (vs. a neutral control condition) on negative emotional responses to politics, and estimating the indirect effects, in turn, on political action motivation (left side) and likelihood of collective political action (right side). The  $c'$  path is included in parentheses. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

received \$2.50 for participation. Participants who completed Study 3 were not eligible to complete Study 4.

**Measures.** See [online Supplemental Materials](#), for all materials, including the full manipulation instructions.

**Regulation Manipulation.** Study 4 experimentally manipulated three emotion regulation strategies—reappraisal, distraction, and acceptance—compared with a no-regulation control. To enhance participants' ability to use their assigned form of emotion regulation while watching the political clip, we provided instructions and examples and then provided participants a chance to practice their assigned form of regulation, consistent with prior research (Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019; McRae et al., 2012; Sheppes et al., 2014). Specifically, participants in the *reappraisal* condition were told that one way to manage emotions is to “reconsider or reframe situations in a new way so that the situations are less upsetting and [you] feel calmer.” Participants in the *distraction* condition were told you could “distract yourself from these situations” and participants in the *acceptance* condition were told you could “simply accept your feelings—let your feelings happen, whatever they may be, pleasant or unpleasant.” Participants were then provided with four concrete examples for how they could engage in their randomly assigned strategy (e.g., for reappraisal: “You could tell yourself the news media often blows politics out of proportion;” for distraction: “Instead of thinking about what is happening in the clip, you could instead think about taking a walk around your neighborhood and the different buildings around you;” for acceptance: “You could tell yourself there is no right or wrong way to respond to this clip”). Participants were then presented with two screenshots from the video clip they would watch and were asked to write 2–3 sentences on the regulation approach they planned to take while watching the video clip.

Participants in the no-regulation control condition were asked to “please just respond to the clip as you naturally would.” They were also presented with two screenshots from the video clip they were going to watch and asked to write two to three sentences about the emotions they thought they would experience while watching the clip.

**Exposure to Daily Politics.** We used the same two pilot-tested political clips (i.e., the Maddow and Carlson clips) used in Study 3.

**Emotion Regulation Manipulation Check.** Participants reported their use of three emotion regulation strategies with single items adapted from the same emotion regulation measure used in Study 2. Participants reported their use of reappraisal (“While watching the clip ... I made myself think about the clip in a way that would help me feel calmer”), distraction (“... I distracted myself from thinking about the clip”), and emotional acceptance (“... I acknowledged and was open to my feelings about the clip, without controlling or changing those feelings”). Mean contrasts with these items confirmed the manipulations were effective: The participants who used reappraisal the most were those in the reappraisal condition, compared to the three other conditions,  $F_s(1, 1,273) > 19.12, p_s < .001$ ; the participants who used distraction the most were those in the distraction condition, compared to the other conditions,  $F_s(1, 1,273) > 648.82, p_s < .001$ ; and the participants who used acceptance the most were those in the acceptance condition, compared to the other conditions,  $F_s(1, 1,273) > 13.23, p_s < .001$ .

**Negative Emotional Responses to Politics, Well-Being, and Action.** The same items as Study 3 were used to assess negative emotion ( $\alpha = .92$ ), psychological well-being ( $\alpha = .81$ ), physical well-being ( $\alpha = .65$ ), political action motivation (single item,

comparable to Studies 1 and 2), likelihood of collective political action ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and likelihood of individual action ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Political Orientation.** Political party and ideology were assessed as in Study 3.

**Procedure.** Study 4 data were collected between November 18–20, 2021—within a week and a half of when the selected Maddow and Carlson broadcasts aired. After reporting demographics, political orientation, and completing a brief audiovisual check, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: reappraisal, distraction, acceptance, or a no-regulation control. Participants then watched either the pilot-tested Maddow or Carlson clip used in Study 3: Like Study 3, Democrats viewed the Maddow clip and Republicans viewed the Carlson clip, and participants who identified as independent or with another party were randomly assigned to view either of the clips. Thus, Study 4 had a 4 (regulation condition)  $\times$  3 (participant political party) between-person design. Following the video clip, participants reported their emotional experiences, emotion regulation, well-being, and political action.

## Study 4: Results

**How Can People Protect Their Emotions in the Face of Daily Politics?** Results indicated that the negative emotion evoked by being exposed to daily politics was significantly attenuated by emotion regulation: Participants who were in the no-regulation control condition experienced significantly more negative emotion,  $M(SD) = 3.82(1.58)$ , compared to those in the three regulation conditions: reappraisal,  $M(SD) = 3.28(1.53)$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.35$ , distraction,  $M(SD) = 2.64(1.70)$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.72$ , and acceptance,  $M(SD) = 3.50(1.52)$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.21$ . The omnibus analysis of variance (ANOVA) was significant,  $F(3, 1,273) = 31.53, p < .001$ , and all mean contrasts with the no-regulation control condition were significant,  $F_s(1, 1,273) > 6.61, p_s \leq .010$ .

**Through Lower Negative Emotion, Does Emotion Regulation Predict Better Well-Being?** Replicating Study 3, negative emotional responses to daily politics, in turn, predicted worse psychological well-being ( $r = -.39, p < .001$ ) and physical well-being ( $r = -.29, p < .001$ ).

We did not find a main effect of experimental condition on psychological well-being,  $F(3, 1,273) = 1.29, p = .278$ , or physical well-being,  $F(3, 1,273) = 1.20, p = .307$ , in the omnibus ANOVA analyses (see footnote, for results examining condition-level contrasts<sup>10</sup>). However, an *indirect effect* may still be present when a statistically significant direct effect is absent (Hayes, 2009; Shrout & Bolger, 2002); Given this, using the same approach as Study 3, we conducted statistical mediation analyses to estimate the indirect effects whereby experimental condition (entered as a categorical “X” variable, one contrast at a time per model; e.g., reappraisal vs.

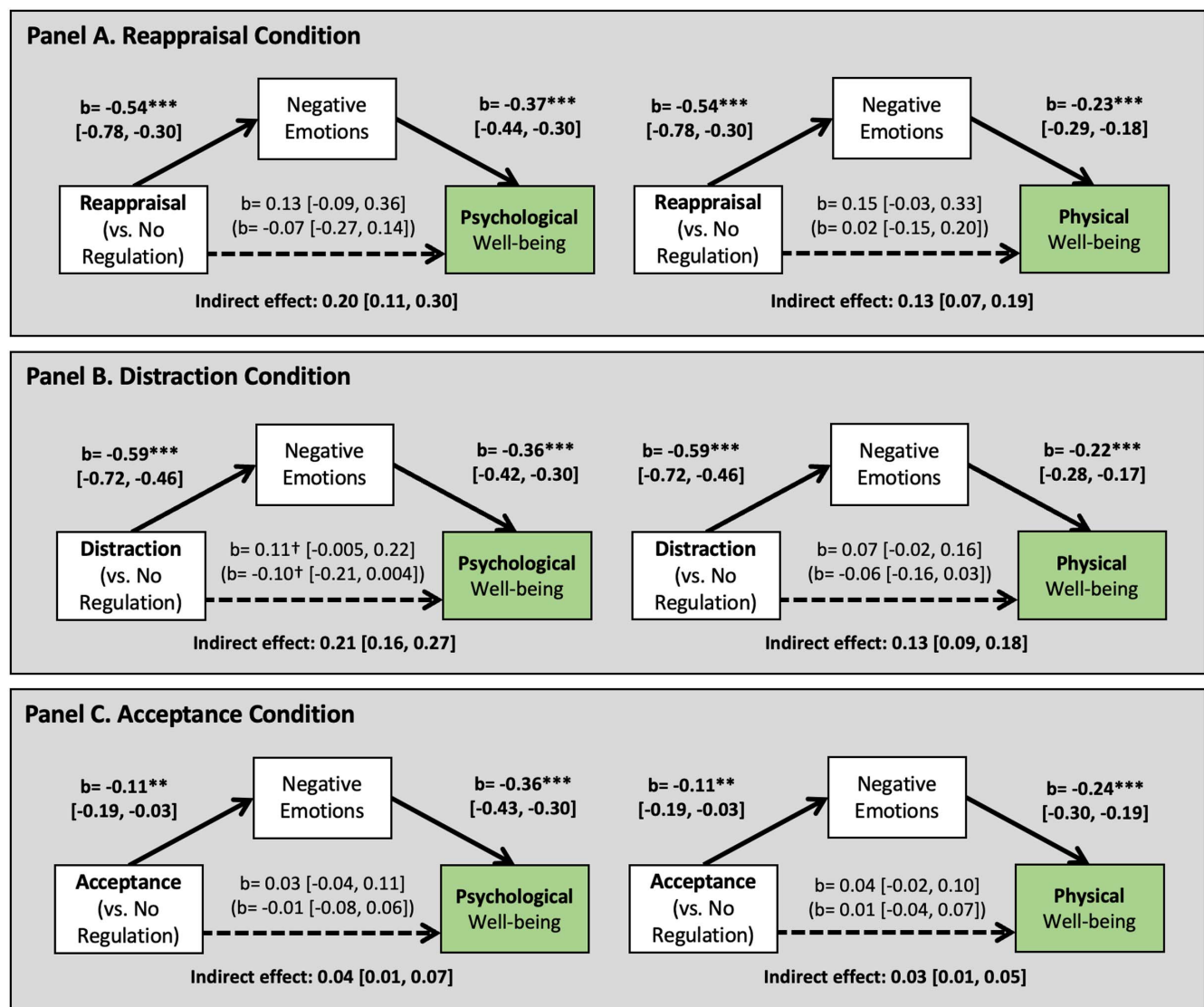
<sup>10</sup> Although we do not interpret the following results due to the non-significant omnibus ANOVAs, we have briefly summarized the mean contrasts between each regulation condition (vs. no-regulation control): Reappraisal had no effect on psychological well-being ( $p = .225$ ), marginally increased physical well-being ( $p = .092$ ), and had no effect on any index of action ( $p_s > .844$ ). Distraction marginally increased psychological well-being ( $p = .054$ ), had no effect on physical well-being ( $p = .122$ ), marginally decreased political action motivation ( $p = .089$ ), and had no effect on either index of action likelihood ( $p_s > .328$ ). Lastly, acceptance had no effect on either index of well-being ( $p_s > .186$ ) or any index of action ( $p_s > .162$ ).

no-regulation control) influenced negative emotion (entered as the mediator “M”), which in turn predicted one measure of well-being (entered as the “Y”). As summarized in Figure 8, we found evidence for significant indirect effects between emotion regulation and greater well-being: Both reappraisal (vs. no-regulation control) and distraction (vs. no-regulation control) resulted in less negative emotion, which in turn was associated with greater psychological and physical well-being. In exploratory analyses, we considered emotional acceptance and found the same pattern: Acceptance (vs. no-regulation control) resulted in less negative emotion, which in turn was associated with greater psychological and physical well-being.

**Through Lower Negative Emotion, Does Emotion Regulation Predict Less Political Action?** Again replicating Study 3, negative emotional responses to daily politics predicted greater motivation to engage in political action ( $r = .40, p < .001$ ), as well as greater likelihood of collective action ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ), and greater likelihood of individual action ( $r = .24, p < .001$ ).

We did not find a main effect between experimental condition and motivation to engage in political action,  $F(3, 1,273) = 1.92, p = .125$ , likelihood of collective action,  $F(3, 1,273) = 1.42, p = .235$ , or likelihood of individual action,  $F(3, 1,273) = 1.65, p = .176$ , in the omnibus ANOVA analyses. Again, given that an *indirect effect* may still be present when a statistically significant direct effect is absent

**Figure 8**  
Study 4 Statistical Mediation Analyses Predicting Well-Being



*Note.* This figure depicts study 4 statistical mediation analyses examining the effect of reappraisal (Panel A), distraction (Panel B), and emotional acceptance (Panel C) on negative emotional responses to politics, and estimating the indirect effects, in turn, on psychological well-being (left side) and physical well-being (right side). The  $c'$  path is included in parentheses. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

†  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

(Hayes, 2009; Shrout & Bolger, 2002), we conducted statistical mediation analyses to estimate the indirect effects following the same procedure outlined above for the well-being analyses. As summarized in Figure 9, we found evidence for significant indirect effects between emotion regulation and less collective action: Both reappraisal (vs. no-regulation control) and distraction (vs. no-regulation control) resulted in less negative emotion, which in turn was associated with lower political action motivation, likelihood of political action, and likelihood of individual action. In exploratory analyses, we considered emotional acceptance and found the same pattern: Acceptance (vs. no-regulation control) resulted in less negative emotion, which in turn was associated with less collective action (across all three measures).

**The Role of Political Orientation.** We examined whether political orientation (party or ideology) moderated any of the associations for the indirect pathway between emotion regulation condition and negative emotion on one hand, and between negative emotion and well-being or political action on the other hand. We found no evidence that the emotion regulation condition resulted in different levels of negative emotion across political parties and political ideology. We also found that the links between negative emotion and lower well-being and between negative emotion and greater collective action were significant for people of different political

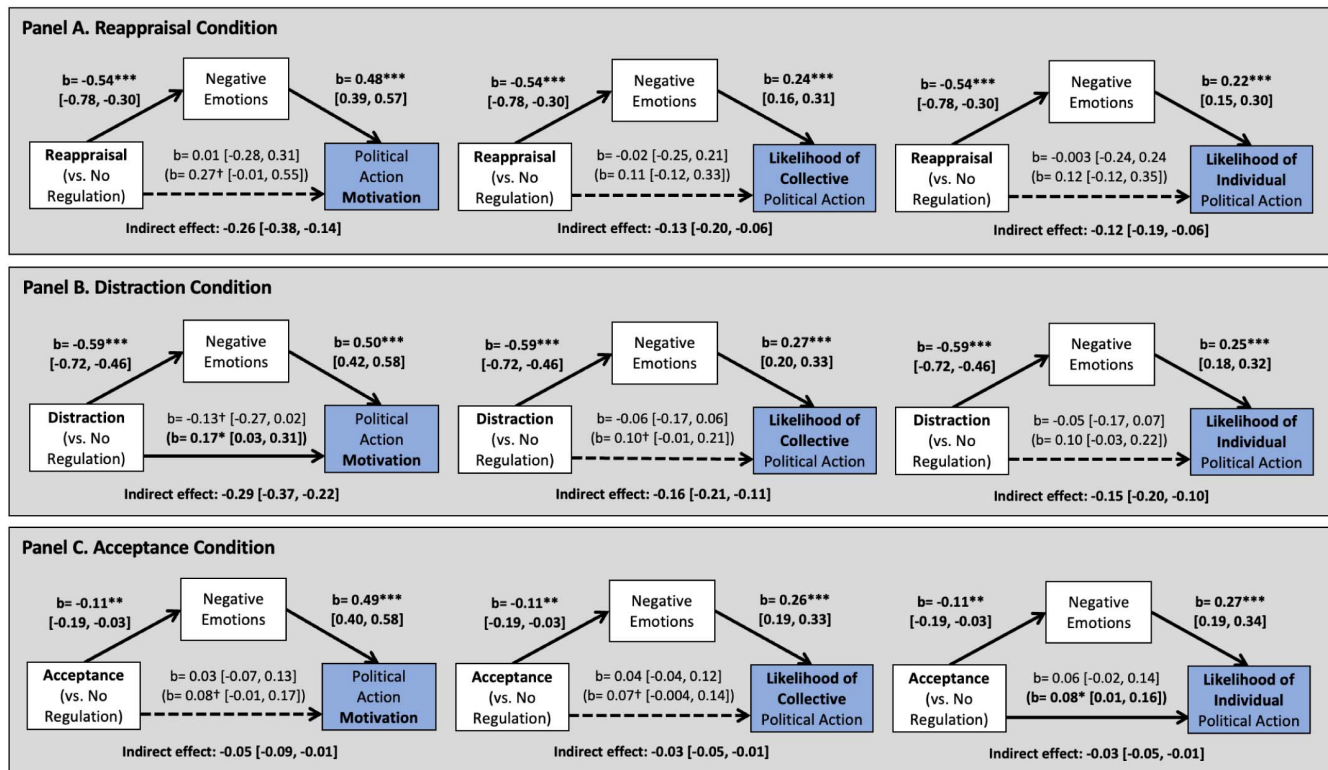
ideologies, but also the links were significantly stronger for liberals (vs. conservatives), although this pattern did not replicate when considering political party as a moderator. Given that this pattern did not replicate when considering political party as a moderator, nor did it replicate in Study 3, we do not interpret this pattern further (see [online Supplemental Materials](#), for all statistics).

#### Study 4: Discussion

Using an experimental design, we again demonstrated that daily politics evoked potent negative emotional reactions, which in turn predicted worse well-being but greater political action. However, we also demonstrated that several forms of emotion regulation—all of which are commonly used in daily life, as we observed in Studies 1 and 2—successfully reduced this negative emotion (vs. a no-regulation control condition), which in turn, was associated with greater well-being but less political action.

These findings provide support for the causal influence of emotion regulation on people's emotional responses to daily politics, and in turn, their well-being and political action. Taken together, these findings complement Studies 1 and 2's correlational design and provide compelling evidence for the important trade-offs of using emotion regulation to cope with the daily stress of politics. Although

**Figure 9**  
Study 4 Statistical Mediation Analyses Predicting Political Action



**Note.** This figure depicts study 4 statistical mediation analyses examining the effect of reappraisal (Panel A), distraction (Panel B), and emotional acceptance (Panel C) on negative emotional responses to politics, and estimating the indirect effects, in turn, on political action motivation (left side), likelihood of collective political action (middle), and likelihood of individual action (right side). The  $c'$  path is included in parentheses. Nonsignificant paths are dashed. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

this study provides evidence for the hypothesized indirect effect between emotion regulation and both well-being and political action, the present findings also raise the question of why we would observe a consistent direct link between *individual variation* in reappraisal and greater well-being and lower political action in Studies 1 and 2 (with similar evidence for distraction in Study 2) but not find this direct link when reappraisal (or distraction) was *experimentally manipulated* in Study 4. Notably, this pattern replicates past research (Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019), and is consistent with multiple possible accounts. For example, it is possible that not everyone in the emotion regulation conditions were compliant with the instructions. This, however, seems unlikely to account for the present results given that the manipulation check results indicated that people on average were indeed using their instructed form of regulation. It is also possible that not everyone in the emotion regulation conditions were able to successfully implement the strategy assigned to them. But again, this seems unlikely to account for the present results given that those in the emotion regulation conditions did indeed experience lower negative emotion in response to daily politics compared to a no-regulation control.

Most plausibly, we propose that experimentally manipulating emotion regulation likely has a more heterogeneous effect compared with the emotion regulation that people use habitually in daily life. Specifically, the present results are consistent with the relatively common perspective that—in addition to the measured mechanism—an unmeasured alternative mechanism is also influencing downstream outcomes in a different direction, thereby suppressing the main effect of the condition. For example, it is possible that in addition to reducing negative emotion, asking people to adopt a particular regulatory approach resulted in them feeling a loss of autonomy, which resulted in decreased well-being (countervailing any increased well-being) and greater motivation to reassert autonomy through taking action (countervailing any decreased motivation). Such a reaction would not occur for people naturally using emotion regulation in daily life, as assessed in Studies 1 and 2, but could occur for people told how to manage their emotions, as we did in Study 4. This possibility highlights how crucial it is to pair naturalistic designs where regulation can emerge naturally with experimental designs, which are highly useful for demonstrating how regulation affects emotion but may not reflect a complete view of how regulation unfolds in daily life.

## General Discussion

Although most day-to-day political events occur far away in state and national capitals, politics and its controversies have become a salient part of everyday life for many in the general public. The day's political events are a common, if not central, topic of conversation in both online and offline contexts. Political discord and scandals headline the news cycle, are joked about on late-night TV programs, and are debated at the dinner table and around the office water cooler. Yet as central as politics is to people's everyday experience, its role in daily life is largely unknown.

In the present research, we applied an affective science framework to the study of politics and political psychology to generate fundamental predictions about people's experience of politics in daily life. By integrating these different disciplines, we advance both affective science (by extending it to the high-impact domain of politics) and political psychology (by using tools from affective

science to better understand how politics shapes people's lives). We hypothesized that, in line with the chronic stress literature, daily political events would frequently elicit negative emotions in the day-to-day lives of citizens, and these emotions would predict worse daily well-being. But, in line with a functional account of emotions, we expected these daily negative emotions would also inspire citizens to take political action aimed at improving upon the political system. Finally, we predicted individuals would use emotion regulation strategies to cope with their negative emotions which would help protect their well-being, but also decrease their motivation to take action. As such, we envision two parallel pathways (see Figure 1, for conceptual model) whereby, on one hand, reducing one's negative emotion through emotion regulation should influence people's sense of psychological and physical health (e.g., feeling more satisfied with life, feeling less fatigued), but on the other hand, should also reduce their motivation to take collective action (e.g., contacting representatives, donating to or volunteering for a valued cause).

To test these predictions, we first tracked diverse samples of Americans (total  $N = 1,009$ ) across two longitudinal studies (Study 1 = 14 days, Study 2 = 21 days) using a daily diary methodology, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the political climate and each person's concomitant reactions. Then we experimentally manipulated exposure to day-to-day political information (Study 3), and the use of various emotion regulation strategies in response to such information (Study 4), which allowed us to test the causal effects of daily politics and the casual impact of using emotion regulation strategies to protect oneself from daily politics. Of note, unlike past work that focused on the impact presidential elections have on people (e.g., Lench et al., 2019; Mefford et al., 2020; Stanton et al., 2010), examining day-to-day political events substantially broadened the focus, allowing for an examination of politics' impact on people's lives, not just once every 4 years, but perpetually.

In Part I, we found—and replicated across two daily diary samples—that daily political events consistently evoked negative emotions in participants. These negative emotions predicted worse day-to-day psychological and physical health, but also greater motivation to take action aimed at changing the political system that evoked the negative emotions in the first place at both the between-person level (interpersonal difference) and within-person level (intrapersonal difference). Furthermore, we found that people commonly used emotion regulation strategies to cope with politics. When successfully using reappraisal (and somewhat less consistently for distraction), people experienced greater well-being, but less motivation to take political action, pointing to a fundamental trade-off between protecting oneself and taking action that arises when people regulate their negative politics-related emotions using effective strategies.

In Part II, we found causal support for the central findings of Part I. In Study 3, participants exposed to daily politics reported significantly worse psychological and physical well-being than participants in a neutral condition. However, these participants also indicated a stronger motivation to take political action, with a particular emphasis on participating in collective action (e.g., donating, demonstrating). Moreover, we found that participants exposed to daily politics experienced heightened negative emotions which mediation analyses suggest help explain why these participants suffered worse well-being but felt more compelled to act. In

Study 4, we manipulated participants' use of emotion regulation when exposed to daily politics. Results showed that the heightened negative emotion participants experienced in response to daily politics was reduced for those in the emotion regulation conditions (relative to the control condition), which, in turn, predicted greater well-being, but less motivation to take action.

Interestingly, across studies, the different negative emotions we measured did not yield distinct patterns of effects (as reported in the [online Supplemental Materials](#)). Regardless of the discrete emotion participants felt in response to daily politics—anger, outrage, disgust, worry, or sadness—they reported worse well-being and greater motivation to take political action. Thus, it appears in the present research what mattered was how much negative emotion participants experienced, rather than which emotions they experienced. Such findings correspond well with existing work (e.g., [Ford, Feinberg, et al., 2019](#)), but also run counter to what some others have found ([Lambert et al., 2019](#); [Lerner et al., 2003](#); [Skitka et al., 2006](#)). We believe we did not obtain different discrete emotion effects in the present research for at least two reasons: First, to have more comprehensive coverage of people's experience of emotions and avoid constraining their responses, we did not specify the *subject of the emotions* participants reported on. If, for example, someone is fearful about possible repercussions of taking political action, it makes perfect sense that this emotion would predict less action, as prior research suggests ([Lambert et al., 2010](#); [Lerner et al., 2003](#)). However, if someone is fearful about the future of America, this emotion would predict greater action ([Lambert et al., 2019](#)). The present research suggests that, on average, various negative emotions motivate action, but it remains likely that particular contextualized instantiations of any emotion could result in different behaviors ([Barrett, 2012](#); [Lambert et al., 2019](#)). Second, to have more comprehensive coverage of people's political action and again avoid constraining their responses, we did not specify the *motivation of participants' political action*, which may have obscured nuanced effects of different emotions. For example, anger might inspire an attack on the rival political party on social media, whereas fear might inspire a post defending one's political party, which would be consistent with prior work suggesting anger often leads to aggressive behaviors, whereas fear leads to protective behaviors ([Lambert et al., 2019](#); [Lerner et al., 2015](#)). In both cases, individuals are engaging in the same political action (i.e., posting on social media), but carrying out that action differently—a nuance that our measures of political motivation did not capture.

### Emotion Regulation: A Trade-Off Between Feeling Good and Doing Good?

This research yields multiple practical contributions, including insights regarding the trade-off between feeling good and doing good. Specifically, we show that using certain commonly used forms of emotion regulation to protect well-being can come at a cost to the motivation toward political action—a fundamental means for shaping a healthy democracy. Exploring this trade-off provides balance to the typically positive view of commonly touted strategies like reappraisal ([Ford & Troy, 2019](#)). From a functionalist perspective, negative emotions direct people toward behaviors that are useful for personal or group survival ([Frijda, 1986, 1992](#); [Keltner & Gross, 1999](#)), and minimizing the experience of negative emotions can decrease motivation to take action aimed at addressing what

elicited the emotions in the first place. As such, there is a tension between the hedonic value of reducing unpleasant emotions and the utility of these emotions for guiding functional behavior ([Cohen-Chen et al., 2020](#)).

Uncovering this trade-off has important implications for understanding collective action behavior ([Cohen-Chen et al., 2020](#)). Although collective action researchers have long recognized negative emotion as a key to mobilizing people to take action ([Miller et al., 2009](#); [Van Zomeren et al., 2004](#)), few have taken into consideration the central role of emotion regulation as these patterns unfold in daily life. Our research highlights that individuals often do not passively experience emotions in real life. Rather, people use emotion regulation strategies to manage their emotions, with critical implications for whether someone will engage in action (e.g., donate, volunteer, contact representatives, protest). For instance, feeling outrage toward an injustice might initially compel people to join a street protest, but if they use reappraisal to assuage their outrage (e.g., by thinking about how the justice system will prosecute the perpetrators), their outrage may diminish along with the likelihood of actually joining the protest. Similarly, if they use distraction, possibly because they find their outrage too intense to reappraise ([Sheppes et al., 2014](#)), they may divert their attention away from the injustice, thereby minimizing their likelihood of taking to the street. Such insights are important for activists seeking to mobilize widespread collective action.

To effectively harness people's negative emotions, activists need people to *not* reduce those emotions, and may even want to increase these emotions. Yet, this may come at the expense of people's well-being, suggesting a complicated ethical trade-off between mobilizing people for a cause and impairing the well-being of those taking action. Anticipating this, social movement organizations might not only rely on negative emotions to mobilize people, but also find ways to bolster well-being *after* an action has taken place. One possibility could be to foster a strong sense of pride in those having just taken action since pride can effectively boost well-being ([Grant & Higgins, 2003](#); [Orth et al., 2010](#)). Movements might hold postevent rallies emphasizing how proud their activists should feel for living up to their values and for standing up for what is right. Instilling pride in this way after an event should help counter the negative emotions and corresponding dips in well-being activists experience prior to the event.

In considering the trade-off between feeling good and doing good, some readers may wonder about the direct association between well-being and collective action. To unpack this link, we conducted exploratory analyses in our largest study (Study 4,  $N = 1,277$ ). For example, we found the association between psychological well-being and likelihood of collective action is small ( $\beta = -.14, p < .001$ ), indicating that people with greater psychological well-being are somewhat less likely to take action. Although it is possible for one's psychological wellness to be a causal driver in the likelihood someone takes action (e.g., people with depression are known to be less motivated to engage in goal-directed action; [Grahek et al., 2019](#)), in the present data, we do not find evidence for a unique association between well-being and collective action that is independent of negative emotional responses to politics: When including both negative emotional responses to politics and well-being as simultaneous predictors of collective action, only negative emotion is significant ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ) and well-being is rendered nonsignificant ( $\beta = -.03, p = .307$ ). We find

the same results when predicting well-being: Only negative emotion is significant ( $\beta = -.38, p < .001$ ), and action is nonsignificant ( $\beta = -.03, p = .307$ ). These results are consistent with our proposed theoretical model whereby reducing negative emotional responses to politics (using effective forms of emotion regulation) has two *independent* sets of outcomes: greater well-being but also less motivation to take political action. Such a pattern also indicates that it is possible to independently increase both well-being and action in politically evocative contexts (or at least, protect well-being without jeopardizing action)—these mechanisms remain an important direction for future work.

## Implications for Emotion Regulation Science

We believe our work also makes several important contributions to the emotion regulation literature, providing key conceptual and methodological insights to affective science. For instance, the majority of studies examining emotion regulation have used global questionnaires (Aldao et al., 2010) or artificial laboratory settings (Webb et al., 2012). Examining the emotion regulation people use to cope with daily political events, therefore, provides a novel real-world context for testing and understanding emotion regulation “in the wild” (Brans et al., 2013; Kalokerinos et al., 2017).

For example, our findings suggest that distraction is used quite commonly in daily life, but empirical research has rarely considered individual differences in distraction. Study 2 demonstrated that using distraction more successfully than usual (i.e., the within-person effect) was uniquely linked with lower negative emotional responses to politics, as well as greater well-being. We complemented these individual difference findings with Study 4’s experimental findings, where distraction (vs. no-regulation) actually had the largest effect size on reducing negative emotion (Cohen’s  $d = 0.72$ ) even compared to reappraisal ( $d = 0.35$ ), suggesting that distraction may be particularly effective at relieving negative emotion in the short-term (cf. Sheppes et al., 2014).

The present research is also the first politically focused research to our knowledge to examine emotional acceptance. We found that acceptance was actually the most commonly endorsed approach to one’s emotions about politics in daily life (in Study 2), compared to the other strategies. We also explored emotional acceptance as a plausible approach to help individuals avoid a trade-off between well-being and political action. Prior work indicates that acceptance helps promote well-being (Ford et al., 2018; Shallcross et al., 2010) and may even help people act in accordance with their values (Hayes et al., 2005). The present studies yielded somewhat mixed results: Individual differences in emotional acceptance uniquely predicted better well-being without impairing participants’ motivation to take political action (Study 2); but experimentally instructed acceptance predicted neither well-being nor motivation to take political action (Study 4). In addition, the present studies add to an already mixed literature on the emotional outcomes of acceptance, with some findings suggesting that acceptance does not consistently predict lower negative emotion in the short term (Kohl et al., 2012) and other findings suggesting that it does (Ford et al., 2018). In the present studies, individual differences in acceptance did not uniquely predict negative emotion (Study 2), whereas instructed acceptance modestly decreased negative emotion (Study 4). This lack of consistency suggests that individual differences in emotional acceptance in daily life may not function the same as instructed

emotional acceptance in a controlled context. Even so, we remain encouraged by the daily diary findings, which suggest that naturally occurring emotional acceptance may indeed serve as a promising pathway to better well-being without the costs to action that other strategies can have.

Our analytic approach also provides at least two additional contributions to the literature on emotion regulation. First, in Studies 1 and 2, we disentangled the successful use of emotion regulation from the effort people put into their regulation attempt. Research typically conflates success with attempts, yet there is no guarantee that those who attempt to use emotion regulation will be successful at doing so. One may try to distract herself from an unpleasant stimulus, but still end up ruminating over it. Likewise, one may try to suppress his anger, but be so enraged that he cannot prevent showing it. Disentangling these constructs is crucial because beneficial downstream outcomes should hinge upon the successful implementation of a given strategy (Ford et al., 2017). The present studies suggest that future research would continue to benefit by parsing apart these empirically and conceptually distinct constructs. Second, we examined the *unique* associations between different emotion regulation strategies and daily outcomes by considering each strategy not only on its own, but also when controlling for the other strategies. People very frequently use multiple forms of emotion regulation to cope with any given stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Ford, Gross, et al., 2019), indicating that it is important to consider the possible overlap between strategies and statistically account for this to learn which strategies are most likely to drive beneficial—or even harmful—daily outcomes.

## Limitations and Remaining Questions

This research has several limitations and unanswered questions that future research might address. In all studies, we examined the generalizability of our findings to people across different parties and ideologies. We found no conclusive evidence that the fundamental links between emotion regulation and emotional responses to politics, or between emotion and political action were substantively different for Democrats versus Republicans versus independents, or liberals versus conservatives. These findings begin to point to the generalizability of these findings across the political spectrum, but future work would benefit from examining other types of generalizability. For example, it is important to note that these studies were conducted among predominantly White samples in the United States—a country that faces high levels of political polarization in a largely two-party system and a media often revolving around inciting moral outrage (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013). Thus, it remains an important question for future research to examine the extent to which daily politics would affect citizens from more diverse ethnoracial backgrounds and in other countries that are less polarized and/or with different political systems.

Although we explored how day-to-day political events impact people’s daily well-being and action tendencies, there are likely other ways in which politics affects people’s lives. For example, politics may take a toll on people’s close relationships. The negative emotions people feel in response to the day’s political occurrences could get projected onto one’s romantic partner, relative, or close friend, especially if that person ascribes to a different political ideology (cf. Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Of course, daily politics might also bring people together as they commiserate over what has transpired.

Daily politics might affect people's satisfaction and motivation at work, even impairing employees' ability to perform on the job. These and other downstream consequences of politics are interesting avenues for future research. Future work may also consider the specific types of actions people engage in, considering that some action is harmful to a democracy (e.g., rioters storming the U.S. Capitol to overturn the 2020 election results); in these cases, emotion regulation that protects personal well-being is also beneficial for the democracy.

Additionally, given that people rarely let their negative emotions go unregulated in daily life, it is important to identify ways that people can protect their own emotional well-being without jeopardizing collective well-being (e.g., by inhibiting collective action). We highlighted emotional acceptance as one approach, but two other alternatives may represent promising pathways forward. First, reappraisal can take many different forms when it is used in the moment (McRae et al., 2012; Uusberg et al., 2019) and although many often-used forms can be demotivating for taking action (e.g., reframing the situation as less severe or as out of one's hands; Knowles et al., 2014), other forms may be less demotivating (e.g., reframing the situation as an opportunity to gain efficacy, or to cultivate a sense of collective pride), and could be targeted more directly. Second, political action was discussed here as an *outcome* of emotion regulation, but for some people, taking action might itself represent a form of emotion regulation (Ford & Feinberg, 2020). Someone might attend a protest, write to a congressperson, or donate to a cause to help themselves feel better. Such an approach may prove useful for activists who could advertise taking action as an effective means for advancing their cause and increasing well-being, appealing to both prosocial and hedonic motives—an idea future work could explore.

Finally, although the present results provide evidence for the theoretical model we propose in Figure 1, these studies cannot rule out additional directional pathways. For example, the experimental findings from Part II demonstrate that daily politics leads to greater negative emotion (Study 3) and that emotion regulation leads to reduced negative emotional responses to politics (Study 4)—in turn, this negative emotion is associated with subsequent experiences of worse well-being but also greater action motivation and likelihood. Other, additional directional pathways are possible as well; for example, improving one's well-being and/or taking political action may also influence one's emotional responses to politics (e.g., greater well-being may help people be less reactive to daily politics; taking action may alleviate concerns about politics)—all of these important constructs are likely interconnected through a variety of bidirectional feedback loops. The aim of the present research was to utilize complementary methods (including daily assessments and experiments) to examine whether people's emotional responses to politics—and how people regulate those responses—may hold trade-offs for well-being and political action. Given that the present studies were not designed to address alternative paths, e.g., we did not conduct reverse mediation models due to concerns regarding the interpretability of such models (Lemmer & Gollwitzer, 2017; Rohrer et al., 2022; Thoemmes, 2015) it remains a fascinating direction for future research to use alternative methodological approaches to examine the complex interplay and bidirectionality between these experiences.

## Conclusion

In all, our research bridges theory and methods from political psychology and affective science, highlighting how these distinct

literatures can intersect to answer important, unexplored questions. Our findings show that the political is very much personal—a pattern with powerful consequences for people's daily lives. More generally, by demonstrating how political events personally impact the average citizen, including their psychological and physical health, our research reveals the far-reaching impact politicians have beyond the formal powers endowed unto them.

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