Angry tweets

A corpus-assisted study of anger in populist political discourse

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The rise of populism has turned researchers' attention to the importance of affect in politics. This is a corpus-assisted study investigating lexis in the semantic domain of anger and violence in tweets by radical-right campaigner Nigel Farage in comparison with four other prominent British politicians. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of discourse show that Farage cultivates a particular set of affective-discursive practices, which bring anger into the public sphere and offer a channel to redirect frustrations. Rather than expressing his own emotions, he presents anger as generalised throughout society, and then performs the role of defending 'ordinary people' who are the victims of the elites. This enables him to legitimise violent emotions and actions by appealing to the need for self-assertion and self-defence.

Keywords: populism, political discourse, emotion, anger, social media

1. Introduction

Recent trends in politics across the world are turning researchers' attention to the role of emotion in politics and political discourse. We are witnessing the emergence of new movements and leaders that can be characterised as populist since they combine a combative communication style with an adept exploitation of social and economic changes in order to attract massive support. This 'populist turn' has been analysed by experts in political discourse (Mudde 2007, 2016; Moffitt 2016) who explore how such politicians align themselves discursively with the people against established elites by conveying messages that trigger fear and anger, and evoke a sense of rising crisis. In parallel to this, political scientists have explored how public fears about immigration and the destruction of communities (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 132), combined with distrust of political elites and

resentment at perceived inequalities (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 212), have destabilised the political landscape. This situation has resulted in massive de-alignment from previous political loyalties and the emergence of a deep-lying 'culture conflict' (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 232) driven by alienation, resentment and fear. Both approaches to the rise of populism ascribe a decisive role to affective factors, which provide an impetus to mobilise large sectors of the population.

This move towards a more emotive approach in politics has been strongly linked to the advent of the Internet and social media, which connect people (and politicians with their voters) in unprecedented ways and which propitiate a more intimate, emotional style of communication. This phenomenon has led some experts to discuss how politicians adapt their performance to the logic of social media (Strömbäck and Esser 2014, 21). Such performances may well expand the traditional scope of political communication, encouraging popular engagement on different levels with politicians' personality, opinions and feelings, and blurring the boundaries between 'political' and 'celebrity' performance (Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010; Wheeler 2011). Many of today's so-called populist leaders (e.g. Trump, Salvini, Wenders) offer interesting variations on these themes.

One space where we might expect to find evidence of a specifically populist approach to communication is Twitter. A recent quantitative study (Ernst et al. 2017) developed a construct of populism based on discursive strategies conveying people-centrism, anti-elitism and arguments for popular sovereignty, and found that parties at both ends of the spectrum were more likely to use such strategies on Twitter and Facebook. The far right used them more than the left, and opposition parties used them more than governing parties. However, the central construct of populism used does not take into account emotions or does so only insofar as these become relevant in the framing of specific issues (elites, the people, etc.). In fact, rational arguments (i.e. 'the elite is corrupt') are just one aspect of populist communication, and the affective/emotional dimension (i.e. 'the corrupt elite makes us angry') is an important marker of a populist political communication style (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 271; Breeze 2019), providing the driving force that lends impact to such arguments and makes them politically operative. Moreover, this exploitation of the affective/emotional in politics is far from spontaneous. According to some experts (Ng and Kidder 2010, 194), we should think of politicians' emotional communication in terms of conscious performance – and vast political potential is available to those players whose affective/emotional performances can resonate with people's reactions and shape their understanding of events.

Within this framework, some recent research has pointed to a particular characteristic of current populist communication, namely the rise of the 'angry populist' style (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019, 127). This engages and overlaps with other

attempts to classify recent populist politicians, such as their need to attribute blame (Wodak 2015; Moffitt 2016), their rudeness and violation of conventions (Leezenberg 2017) or their attempts to polarize society through the frequent use of dichotomies (Breeze 2017). However, since anger is a specific phenomenon that is currently attracting scholarly interest (Mishra 2017), it is worth considering populists' use of anger as a topic in itself.

Against this background, the present study sets out to explore the way Nigel Farage, a politician often classed as populist (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 8–10, 285; Ekström, Patrona and Thornborrow 2018), deploys anger to political effect on Twitter. Farage has been an instrumental figure in British political life over the last 20 years: his single-minded anti-EU campaign was a key factor in redrawing the map of British politics (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015), influencing popular opinion against the EU, bringing about the Brexit Referendum, and pushing the Conservative party to the right (Bale 2018, 274; Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 285; Deakin 2019). His political style has been characterised as quintessentially populist, building closeness to the people and distance from elites. His performances of 'speaking frankly' using 'blunt and hyperbolic language' and 'bad manners' build a public persona that projects honesty and realism in the face of corruption and deceit (Ekström, Patrona and Thornborrow 2018). So far, however, the emotional/affective dimension of his performance has not been explored in depth.

In order to provide points of contrast, Farage's tweets are compared here with those from the Twitter accounts of four other prominent politicians with varying styles and political affiliations. These are: Theresa May and Boris Johnson, both Conservative (at the time of the study, May was Prime Minister and Johnson was Foreign Secretary); and Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer (both Labour, Corbyn was leader of the Labour opposition and Starmer the Labour Brexit Secretary). The rationale underlying this choice was to allow for the analysis to establish comparisons with politicians in mainstream political parties, who might offer a model of non-populist style (see below for further details).

The research questions addressed here are the following:

1. How does Nigel Farage express anger on Twitter?
2. How do his expressions of anger differ from those of four other UK politicians?
3. What light does this shed on the role of anger in populist discourse?

2. Affective-discursive practices and emotional regimes

To prepare the way for the empirical study, some theoretical background needs to be sketched concerning affect/emotion in discourse, the role of particular emotions, and their importance in social media.

2.1 Affect and emotion in discourse

Although we have known since Aristotle that emotion is a fundamental aspect of political persuasion, the realm of affect has long been neglected by political analysts. As Wetherell (2012) argues, discourse analysts have often preferred to separate affect (viewed as an unpredictable, disorderly and even dangerous element) from discourse proper (understood as ideology in language, explicable in propositional terms), and to concentrate on the latter. However, in the political sphere in particular, affect is undeniably a powerful factor that can be harnessed to further diverse political ends. As Clough puts it, affect is “a vector of unqualified intensity seeking future actualization” (Clough 2012, 23). Of course, affect/emotion is not the same as thought/cognition, but the two aspects are much more closely bound up together than has often been assumed. Indeed, psychological research takes the view that affect/emotion is not just made up of expression, bodily symptoms and arousal, but also encompasses the action tendencies associated with arousal (fight/flight), and a cognitive component (appraisal/evaluation of situation) (Scherer 2005). In other words, affective/emotional effects are inescapably bound up with cognitive/ideological assessments and vice versa.

In brief, we can start from the view that affect is an impulse which coalesces in the form of specific emotions: emotions are the way we understand and interpret these in our culture, and can be understood in terms of stimulus, intensity, appraisal, and short- and long-term response (Scherer 2005, 71). The social nature of emotion is extremely important: we may experience affect/emotion as something spontaneous, yet we know that emotions are ‘overlearned cognitive habits’ (Reddy 2001, 32). Emotions are involuntary in the short term, but may be learned (or unlearned) over a longer time frame, and training (e.g. in childhood) involves mental control and goal relevance (i.e. children learn to control impulses because of social pressure/external goals or rewards). Discourses are articulatory practices that organise social relations, and emotions are an integral part of these practices and relations. In the long term, repeated experience of specific emotions in connection with particular events may lead to the consolidation of affective dispositions and, on a broader, societal scale, affective practices. In this context, Wetherell et al. (2015, 57) argue for an investigation of what they term ‘affective-discursive practices’, that is, of the way that feelings and ideologies are intricately

entwined, to identify “patterned forms of human activity articulating, mobilising and organising affect and discourse”.

Returning to our immediate concern, namely political discourse analysis, we can see that the conventional separation between affect/emotion and discourse is problematic in two senses. As Wetherell et al. (2015, 57) state, it is extremely challenging to disentangle affect from ideology, since the feelings and the ideas that trigger them are closely bound up together. Even if we can achieve this separation, the results may well be misleading, since ideological discourse is often powerful precisely because of its emotional/affective impact on target audiences (Breeze 2019). Affect/emotion is culturally shaped, starting from basic socialisation processes in specific cultures, but it is then also influenced by powerful messages sent out through the media and other institutions, which cannot be understood in isolation from the discourses through which it is transmitted. The way in which certain patterns of conduct (including discursive styles, embodied practices and ways of experiencing and fostering emotions) coalesce within social groups has led some experts to talk of ‘emotional styles’ operating through social groups or societies as a whole. These ‘styles’ regulate the norms of emotional expression or control – and attribute specific values and understandings to particular emotions (Gammerl 2012, 162–4). The awareness of the profoundly social, acquired nature of the way we understand, control and practise affect/emotion has even led some social historians to talk of ways of feeling across whole sectors of society at a particular time as ‘emotional regimes’, namely, “the set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime” (Reddy 2001, 129). In other words, socially accepted ways of feeling are integral to the political sphere.

2.2 Anger in politics

Specifically concerning anger, the literature provides various different suggestions as to how it should be understood in relation to other emotions, particularly fear, sadness and worry. To provide a robust, empirically grounded framework for the present study, this paper uses the Geneva system for categorising emotions (Scherer 2005; Gillioz et al. 2016). The original Geneva classification based on verbal report data situates 16 main emotion terms and their subtypes on two axes (high/low control and positive/negative valence): here, anger comes almost at the top, near ‘high control’ (i.e. high coping potential), on the negative side, while fear is similarly negative but comes in ‘low control’ (low coping potential) (Scherer 2005, 723). More recent research from the Geneva group (Gillioz et al. 2016) suggests that it would be more profitable to classify emotions into four dimensions:

valence, power (control), arousal and novelty. Graphs 1 and 2 illustrate how the key emotions considered here (anger, fear, anxiety/worry) compare to two other basic emotions (happiness and sadness) in the Geneva dimensions. As Graph 1 shows, fear and anger are almost polar opposites on the power dimension (anger is high power, fear is low), but they are both classed as having negative valence, high arousal, and neutral novelty (Graph 2). Anxiety/worry is close to fear on all counts, except that it has lower novelty (i.e. less ‘shock’ value) (Graph 2). This makes anger particularly interesting in political contexts, as it is associated with high power/control and potential for action, while fear and anxiety/worry are related to a sense of helplessness.

Graph 1. Plot of factor scores for valence and power (based on Gillioz et al. 2016,145)

Graph 2. Plot of factor scores for arousal and novelty (based on Gillioz et al. 2016,145)

The special characteristics of anger are underlined by researchers from other theoretical fields. In Nussbaum's (2016,8) view, anger is, in essence, a call for action, a plea for retribution. Anger in individuals has three instrumental roles: it is a signal that someone recognises a wrong done to them, it is a motivating force, in that it impels that subject to action, and it is related to justice, since it is an impulse to right wrongs. Although anger may be purely personal and even vindictive, it also has a socially acceptable variant which provides the energy to fight for social justice. Moreover, according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2019,90) anger is "crucial as a distinctly political emotion". She argues that this can be seen particularly in public manifestations airing shared grievances, which she characterises as "collective anger articulated in public" (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019,92). In her analysis, the social construction and performance of this 'public' anger by its protagonists propagate changes in social meanings. But such performances are not spontaneous or random. Ng and Kidder (2010,211) point out that politicians' emotive performances are "reflexive acts that entail at once the expression of emotion and the justification of that expression". Since performances of strong emotion require powerful reasons, the political enactment of anger is part of a larger phenomenon in which culture, social attitudes and political ideology all play a role. If the different elements fit together, we can see how new emotional regimes offered by upcoming parties or campaigns can serve as ways to break hegemony and change the political landscape.

Some recent research focusing on the Netherlands (Leezenberg 2017) and the USA (Ott 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019) has drawn attention to the key role of anger in right-wing populism. Leezenberg (2017) links populist anger with the systematically provocative style of communication used by Geert Wilders and his party. Wilders' tweets leave no space for reasoned argument, they are "rude, crude and systematically confrontational" (Leezenberg 2017,251). Indeed, they seem to intentionally flout the rules of polite conversation or debate in a carefully thought-out aggressive communication strategy. It is worth noting that according to Leezenberg (2017,259), Wilders' discourse is "not only *about* violence, it is a discourse *of* violence: he employs a vocabulary of war and physical violence rather than political debate". Along rather different lines, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) discusses the anger surrounding the inauguration of Donald Trump, suggesting that the rise of Trump has been accompanied by a change in emotional regime to one characterised by 'angry populism' (2019,127). In her words, "Trump's populism works because of the anger it expresses: anger is foundational to his appeal and to his political project" (2019,126). However, interestingly she also shows how the media represent anger as an increasingly important social phenomenon among both Trump's supporters and his opponents. This widespread perception and expression of anger in public life appears to have subtle links to the legiti-

sation of anger in other social spheres, leading to a rise in racism, homophobia, etc. (Ott 2017).

2.3 The social media environment

Finally, a few words should be added about the choice of Twitter for this study. Much early research on social media exuded optimism, insisting on their potential for changing society from the grass roots upwards. Indeed, some bibliography on the Arab Spring (Ben Moussa 2013; Nadeem 2019) suggests that media such as Twitter bring people together in new ways to operationalise innovative forms of political action. However, as KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) have analysed in parallel contexts, digital practices are clearly embedded in social practices and social media phenomena cannot be understood within the context of digital affordances alone. As Rone (2012, 215) has noted, “the digital utopia cannot escape the firm hand of the offline social divisions and problems. Behind the promises of easy freedom and instant social gratification, there are real dangers of unleashing unexpected passions for belonging and revenge”. Research into the fringes of politics has shown that political extremists quickly embraced digital technologies in order to propagate their ideology (Brindle and MacMillan 2017, 110). Twitter, a medium characterised by simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility (Ott 2017), particularly lends itself well to the expression of strong political views. Tweets are often sparked by an affective charge, and strong emotion raises their chances of being relayed through the social network (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013, 217).

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Methodological approach

To obtain a representative picture of emotions in the tweets of the politicians in this study, I wanted to include all the tweets available from their Twitter accounts at the time of data collection. To handle these large corpora, identify areas of text that were potentially of interest, and conduct robust comparisons, I followed the principles of CADS (corpus-assisted discourse studies) (Partington and Marchi 2015, 217). This approach relies on the use of corpus linguistic techniques to detect patterns for subsequent qualitative exploration, and to test whether aspects identified qualitatively are representative, seeking “a balance between rigor (in numbers) and detail (in language)” (Partington and Marchi 2015, 215). However, the design of the present study is innovative within CADS methodology in that semantic tagging, rather than keywords or wordlists, is used to locate potentially

interesting areas of meaning. Semantic tagging is a useful aid for analysing large samples of data, and makes it possible to quantify phenomena reliably using normalised frequencies, and run comparisons between corpora (Breeze 2019). Like other forms of corpus analysis, it affords insights into patterns emerging over larger bodies of text that might otherwise pass unnoticed. For this purpose, I used the platform Wmatrix4, available from UCREL (Rayson 2008, 2009). Unlike most commercial sentiment analysis programs, Wmatrix4 actually tags all the words in the text, assigning them to one of 21 discourse fields which are then subdivided into fine-grained categories, which opens up the possibility of extending searches in various ways. In the case of emotion, for example, Wmatrix4 classifies emotion-related words into six major categories, each of which has neutral, positive and negative subclasses (e.g. E2 (liking) has subclasses E2+ (like) and E2- (dislike), and words such as 'like', 'love' and 'enjoy' are tagged E2+). However, semantic tagging obviously presents some shortcomings. First, lexical items are tagged automatically with reference to a dictionary (in this case, McArthur 1981), which means that implicit expressions of emotion are not likely to be detected; conversely, polysemy means that most searches generate a number of false positives, ironic uses, etc., which have to be discarded manually or reclassified. Second, combinations involving negation (e.g. 'not angry') can only be detected by reading concordance lines, although arguably, from a discourse analytical perspective, the mere mention of the possibility of anger is interesting in itself. On balance, the combination between quantitative and qualitative methods here was understood to be positive, since it provided a stronger basis for comparison. The next sections explain the corpus design, and provide an overview of the quantitative and qualitative methodology used for the analysis.

3.2 Corpus description

The sample includes all tweets available on 26 December 2018 from the accounts of: Nigel Farage (UKIP/Brexit Party); Theresa May and Boris Johnson (Conservative); and Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer (Labour). Johnson and Corbyn have both sometimes been described as populists (Martell 2018; Krapp 2019; Watts and Bale 2019), while May and Starmer are reputed to have a serious, mainstream political style. Table 1 shows the politicians, their affiliation, the number of tweets collected, and the dates. For collection purposes, the *rtweet* package in R was used, which obtains all public tweets from the account in question. Differences in dates can be explained by the fact that politicians often delete, suspend or protect their Twitter accounts (Weaver et al. 2018), and in Farage's case, the late start date may be linked to the widely publicised hacking of prominent UKIP and Brexit supporters' Twitter accounts in March 2017. The

data were cleaned, retweets eliminated, and tweets extracted and stored as text files. The five corpora were uploaded to Wmatrix4 for semantic tagging (Rayson 2008; Wmatrix4).

Table 1. Corpora: Descriptive data

Politician	Party	No. of tweets	Dates
Nigel Farage	UKIP / Brexit	2191	(23 March 2017–26 December 2018)
Boris Johnson	Conservative	966	(2 April 2015–26 December 2018)
Theresa May	Conservative	777	(30 June 2016–26 December 2018)
Jeremy Corbyn	Labour	599	(22 May 2015–26 December 2018)
Keir Starmer	Labour	1726	(4 December 2014–26 December 2018)

3.3 Quantitative analysis

Semantic areas related to emotions were identified (classed ‘E’ in Wmatrix4, see above), and normalised frequencies of emotion categories were obtained as percentages of running words. Data were obtained for positive and negative emotion lexis in all five corpora, wordlists were obtained, and the relevant concordance lines were examined to determine the locus of anger/violence, the semantic/syntactic behaviour of ‘attack’, the extent to which anger/violence was self-initiated or out-group initiated, and the principal emoters of anger/violence, fear and worry.

3.4 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis centred on close reading of the entire tweets containing the tagged lexical items. To analyse emotion in discourse, it is important to consider who the emoter is, what the trigger is, what standards of evaluation are being applied, why these evaluations are being expressed, and what the speakers’ and hearers’ beliefs, values and schemas are (Bednarek 2009,165). This study concentrates on the first two of these (emoter, i.e. person who feels the emotion, and trigger, i.e. cause of the emotion), with interpretation of the other aspects where appropriate. Importantly for this analysis, not all emotion statements explicitly identify the emoter. In many cases, the emotion is expressed in a more covert way (‘there is a lot of anger about this’ as opposed to ‘I am angry about this’).

This analysis uses the following simple division, which proved sensitive enough to bring to light a large number of differences:

- named emoter (‘it makes you angry’)
- covert emoter (‘there is a lot of anger’)

4. Quantitative analysis

4.1 Overview of emotion-related lexis

Graph 3 illustrates how the balance between lexis classified in Wmatrix4 as indicating positive and negative emotions varies considerably between the individuals concerned.

Graph 3. All positive and negative emotion lexis (% of all words)

Tweets by two of the opposition politicians (Farage, Corbyn) contained a greater proportion of negative than positive emotional lexis. The tweets by the two politicians from the Conservative party (May and Johnson), in power at the time of the study, contained more positively-tagged words than did those by the other politicians, and overall had more positive than negative elements, which could be explained by their reduced need to voice criticism. Another way of interpreting this would be to say that some politicians' tweets offer a more balanced emotional profile, while others are more inclined to express themselves in predominantly positive or negative terms. In this case, we see that Johnson, Corbyn and Starmer offer a balance of positive and negative emotions, while Farage tends to the negative and May to the positive.

4.2 Positive emotion-related lexis

Looking at the different types of emotional elements in more detail, we find that the positively-tagged emotional elements across the whole sample seem to con-

centrate on the areas classified as ‘happy’ and ‘content’ (Graph 4), where May and Johnson also have higher scores than the other three.

Graph 4. Positive emotion-related lexis in the five corpora (% of all words)

4.3 Negative emotion-related lexis

On the other hand, negative emotion-related lexis is more prominent in the tweets by Johnson and Farage (Graph 5). When viewed by categories, it turns out that their high score is mainly accounted for by elements related to ‘violent/angry’. Johnson has the highest score for words in the categories ‘sad’ and ‘worry’, while Farage has the highest score for ‘fear/shock’.

Graph 5. Negative emotion-related lexis in the five corpora (% of all words)

Focusing just on the category E3- (violent/angry), I used the Wmatrix4 ‘list’ function to extract the word families that were more salient in the five corpora. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Most frequent negatively loaded lexical elements in E3- (violent/angry) (% of all words) ($F > 0.01\%$)

Words (no. of different types)	Nigel Farage (47)	Boris Johnson (43)	Theresa May (25)	Jeremy Corbyn (59)	Keir Starmer (41)
threat/threaten	0.06	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02
attack	0.07	0.18	0.05	0.07	0.03
bully	0.05				
violence/violent	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.05
anger/angry	0.02				
fight	0.02				
hit				0.03	
abuse				0.03	0.03

4.4 Locus of anger/violence

The first question was where the anger or violence mentioned in the different corpora was located. To this end, I read the whole tweets using the concordance generated for E3-, and identified the locus of ‘anger/violence’ in each case. The results are displayed in Graph 6, as percentages of all instances of E3- for each speaker.

Graph 6. Locus of anger/violence-related lexical elements (% of instances)

It should be noted that during this phase of analysis, several categories that were originally separated had to be merged together. These were:

- Terrorism/war: given the association between these two categories in Afghanistan, Syria, Israel, etc., it was more practical to keep them together than to attempt separation.
- Gender/race: this category covers all kinds of social violence, including domestic violence, sexual abuse, racist abuse and bullying.
- Environment/animals: this covers all types of violent action envisaged in relation to animals and nature, including violence caused by animals or climatic conditions.

The most striking aspect of Graph 6 is the salience of politics as the main arena in which violence is envisaged in Farage's tweets. To some extent it is usual that political struggle, possibly conceptualised in violent terms, should be more prominent in comments by politicians who do not currently hold power (Ernst et al. 2017). Both the Labour politicians have a higher frequency of anger/violence associated with the domain of politics than the two Conservatives. However, the predominance of this locus in Farage's tweets is startling. Over half of all the violent elements in his tweets are associated with the political domain (67/101). This suggests that, to a much greater extent than any of the other politicians studied, Farage envisages politics as a violent arena. On the other hand, Boris Johnson's high percentage of tweets relating to violence in the context of terrorism and war is unsurprising, as he was Foreign Secretary for a large part of the period from which the tweets were gathered, and he evidently felt it necessary to condemn acts of terrorism and illicit acts of warfare in various parts of the world and express solidarity with the victims. The following examples are illustrative of this contrast:

(1) I condemn the cowardly attack in Cairo. (Johnson)

(2) Tell the arrogant unelected EU bullies where to go. (Farage)

The first of these (1) is framed rationally, and the writer's positioning is clearly opposed to the violent act: few would disagree with this condemnation of terrorism, and the use of the term 'attack' implies no escalation of violence from what was probably an extremely bloody event. The use of the first person and the qualifying adjective 'cowardly' adds emotional intensity, but not in such a way as to violate social consensus. The second (2) is qualitatively different. First, it is politically controversial: by depicting the EU authorities as 'bullies', and delegitimising them further as 'arrogant' and 'unelected', Farage is openly adopting an ideological anti-European slant. But we should note that this is not mere denigration: the characterisation of the EU authorities as bullies frames them as aggressors, thus

triggering a narrative in which acts of aggression are perpetrated against innocent parties, and in Farage's discourse the UK and the British people constitute those innocent parties. We could term this kind of discourse a violent scenification: a hyperbolic *mis-en-scène* in which elements of disagreement are intentionally scaled up to become elements of physical conflict, activating a familiar conceptual metaphor to ideological effect (Musolff 2016).

By offering a narrative that situates the EU authorities as aggressors against the listeners, Farage invites readers to share his feelings – that is, he models an emotional stance, suffusing the situation with strong emotion on both sides: anger and violence on the part of the 'bullies', and indignation on the part of those who suffer the bullying actions. Finally, his own positioning is clearly also aggressive: he exhorts readers to "tell the bullies where to go". This simulation of playground aggression, with its macho undertones, finds many echoes in the corpus of Nigel Farage's tweets. In the detailed qualitative study that follows, these different aspects will be explored in greater depth.

5. Qualitative analysis

In order to explore these insights further, I then conducted a comparative study of four of the most frequent word families associated with anger/violence in Farage's tweets (see Table 3 above), namely 'attack', 'violence/violent', 'anger/angry', and 'bully'. Due to space limitations, the more diffuse associations found with 'threat/threaten' are omitted from the present analysis. Two of the selected words ('attack' and 'violence/violent') occur in all the corpora, while two ('anger/angry' and 'bully') are salient ($F < 0.02\%$) only for Farage. None the less, instances from the other corpora are used for comparative purposes where available. The analysis in each case is adapted to the grammatical differences between these words ('attack' and 'bully' are noun/verb, while 'violence/violent' and 'anger/angry' are noun/adjective), and the different possibilities that these offer for the expression of emotions and the identification of emoters. We should note that with the exception of 'anger/angry' these words do not, in themselves, describe strong emotions; nonetheless, they all imply situations in which strong emotions are understood to occur, and thus provide a reliable indicator of the types of aggression and negatively connoted behaviour that are mentioned in these politicians' tweets.

5.1 Attacks and attackers

‘Attack’ is not an emotion in itself, but rather a strongly negatively connoted word that provokes emotional reactions. Table 3 sheds some light on the actors involved, showing who the attackers and the attacked are.

Table 3. Attackers and attacked in the five corpora

	Subject (named thing or person who attacks)	Object (named thing or person who is attacked)
Nigel Farage	Terrorism 16	Donald Trump 1
	Donald Trump 1	Self 1
	Jeremy Corbyn 1	
	Self 1	
	Other 2	
Boris Johnson	Terrorism/war 66	Churchill 1
	Hard-left mob 1	Mrs Thatcher 1
	Nobel Prize Winners 1	
Theresa May	Terrorism 19	
Jeremy Corbyn	Terrorism 35	Stephen Lawrence 1
	Conservative politicians 9	Syria 1
	Racists 1	Families 2
	Donald Trump 1	Public sector 2
		Sadiq Khan 1
		Self 1
Keir Starmer	Terrorism 9	European values 1
	Conservative politicians 6	Crime victims 2
	Criminals 2	Civil service 1
	Press 1	Human rights 2
		Economy 1
		High Court ruling on Brexit 1
		Labour MPs 1

Terrorism and related scenarios (i.e. the war in Syria) offer the most frequent site for ‘attack’ (N) and ‘attack’ (V) in all five corpora. Terrorist attacks are mainly presented as a noun phrase without a named personal target, although the place of the attack is usually named (e.g. ‘terrorist attack in Afghanistan’). The Conservative politicians in this sample do not frame ‘attack’ as something initiated by their political antagonists, while the two Labour politi-

cians position ‘Conservative politicians’ as attacking a number of social targets (‘the public sector’, ‘the economy’, ‘families’, etc.). Farage is unique in envisaging himself as the initiator of an ‘attack’ (3).

- (3) @NigelFarage attacks Theresa May’s Brexit plans and says she should be sacked

He also presents himself as the direct object of an ‘attack’ (because he had suggested disciplining an EU state) (4).

- (4) Good move. When I suggested this before everyone attacked me.

5.2 Violence/violent

Table 4 shows how the lemmas ‘violence’ and ‘violent’ are used in the corpora, indicating where possible who is violent to whom or, at least, what domain of social life the violence is situated in.

Table 4. Contexts of violence in the five corpora

	Who is violent to whom?
Nigel Farage	Left-wingers – self/in-group 6 Remainers – self/in-group 2 Spanish government – Catalans 2 Conservative party – self 1 EU – UK 1
Boris Johnson	Terrorism 7 Gender-related 3
Theresa May	Gender-related 6
Jeremy Corbyn	Gender-related 12 Terrorism 2 Crime 2 Spanish government – Catalan independence movement 2 Other 2
Keir Starmer	Gender-related 26 Crime 6 Terrorism 1

All, except Farage, devote some attention to gender-related violence. As an MP with a London constituency, Starmer is particularly concerned with street crime. Both Farage and Corbyn side with the Catalan independence movement against supposed violence from the Spanish government.

Remarkable in all of this is the victim position adopted by Farage: in the majority of cases, he places himself (‘my own experience’), or the people he repre-

sents ('Brexit voters') or sympathises with ('@POTUS'; i.e. Trump), as the victim of violent actions. His opponents, we note, are not only violent: they 'glorify' and 'legitimise' violence (5, 6, 7).

- (5) @TheNewEuropean are glorifying violence against Brexit voters
- (6) The hard left are increasingly violent. I speak from my own experiences
- (7) The MSM hate @POTUS so much they have legitimised left wing violence

A representation of widespread violence is achieved through the use of mini-scenarios carefully narrated to rope in huge sectors of society as potential victims (8):

- (8) It's ridiculous how violent protesters from the left have become towards anyone who doesn't share their opinions

We should also note the way that violence is vaguely located on the left, without a specific explanation of the circumstances or context (9):

- (9) There is a very violent intolerant fascism that occurs on the left. Shameful that many people are ignoring that fact for political gain

By contrast, as was observed above, Boris Johnson's allusions to violence mainly date from his time as Foreign Secretary, and locate violence firmly in the domain of war and terrorism (10):

- (10) #Iran must use influence on #Assad regime to end violence now

Gender issues are by far the most prominent locus of violence mentioned by the other three politicians. Thus, Theresa May voices her government's commitment (11):

- (11) This government is committed to working to support the victims of domestic violence, but also to working to ensure that we end violence against women & girls

Corbyn similarly declares (12):

- (12) Together, we must end violence against women and girls

Finally, Keir Starmer uses 'sexual violence' 9 times and 'domestic violence' 11 times, mainly tweeting to promote various social campaigns to raise awareness about gender-related violence or achieve justice for victims. In one of several campaigning tweets, he states (13):

- (13) Proud of my SOAS ParliaMentor students: this was their choice & a good one too. Don't stay silent on domestic violence

5.3 Anger/angry

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this exploration of lexical items tagged E3- is the behaviour of ‘anger/angry’ and their near synonyms. Graph 7 shows the instances of ‘anger/angry’, ‘outrage/outraged’, ‘fury/furious’, and ‘rage’, and the emoters in each case.

Graph 7. Emoter of ‘anger’ and synonyms

In this case, it is noticeable that Farage exceeds all the others in his use of ‘anger/angry’ and synonyms. He claims to perceive widespread anger among broad groups of emoters (‘Brexiters’, ‘Remainers’, ‘citizens’, ‘Europe’), and his stance shows sympathy with angry positions (14, 15, 16, 17).

- (14) I suspect that many angry upset Brexiters in Middle England will see Trump’s words as a validation of their own feelings
- (15) The anger of constituents is being felt in Parliament tonight
- (16) The global elites think 2016 (EU Referendum) was a short term outburst of anger from a group of citizens who simply don’t know what is good for them
- (17) The European Commission has united Europe in outrage over the corrupt cronyism of the @MartinSelmayr appointment

Importantly, Farage himself is not stating that he himself is angry. In some examples, the emoter is presented as a vague collective ‘angry upset Brexiters’, ‘citizens’ or ‘constituents’. But in others, ‘anger’ is represented as a generalised abstract

entity, with the implication that it is shared by vast numbers of people. Importantly, he often makes use of covert expression of emotion: in the following example, he posits large amounts of ‘anger out there’ (18).

(18) Given the amount of anger out there are you now afraid to state your politics?

Once, the audience is addressed directly as ‘you’ the emoter (19):

(19) If the Remainer rebellion in the House of Commons makes you angry just wait until the unelected House of Lords gets its turn

Notably, Farage never appears as the direct emoter of anger: the emoters are the people whom he claims to represent (voters, you), or the people he sides with (Trump). Importantly, he also paints a picture of anger on both sides of the political divide: Brexiteers and citizens are angry, but Remainers and the Establishment are also angry. By asserting emotion on both sides, he then claims a position for himself variously as a defender of the just cause (siding with anger) or a spokesman for the suffering people (siding with those at whom anger is directed).

5.4 Bullies and bullying

In noun and verb form, the word ‘bully’ accounts for 0.05% of the lexical items in Farage’s tweets, an unusual frequency for a rather rare word. Table 5 shows who is identified as bullies, or as undertaking bullying actions, in the five corpora.

Table 5. Agents of bullying in the five corpora

	Who are the bullies?
Nigel Farage	EU 14 WHO 1 Liberal left 1
Boris Johnson	EU 1
Theresa May	Schoolchildren 2
Jeremy Corbyn	Donald Trump 2 MPs 1
Keir Starmer	Conservative government 1

As we can observe, Theresa May’s use of ‘bully’ is conventional, in that she is referring to problems that happen in schools. Johnson, Corbyn and Starmer all use ‘bully’ to describe relationships between political entities, but they make sparing use of this metaphor. However, Farage delights in the use of ‘bully’ both as noun and verb. Certain combinations: ‘the bully boys in the EU/Brussels’ occurs six times, while variations around ‘arrogant/unelected EU bullies’ occur

four times. Interestingly enough, it is not spelled out who exactly the bullies' victims are, since they are generally left unstated as in these instances, or in (20):

(20) EU thuggery and bullying by a group of bad people

Occasionally, though, the victims are quite explicitly identified as 'us' ('our TV screens') (21):

(21) Look at this. All across the western world the liberal left are trying to bully and shout the other point of view off our TV screens. This must be stopped

5.5 Anger/violence and agency

Within the examples studied above, it is clear that most angry or violent actions or feelings emanate from others. But interestingly, the Farage corpus contains a significant proportion of cases in which he implicitly sides with the emoter/instigator: the anger/violence is envisaged as in-group initiated, and, therefore, as legitimate (Graph 8).

Graph 8. Percentage of tweets in which angry/violent elements are envisaged as other-initiated or in-group-initiated

Graph 8 illustrates the way in which the attribution for all the violent elements identified by E3- is distributed. Thus, almost all the violent elements in Johnson's and May's tweets are understood to be caused by out-group actors (ISIS, terrorists, criminals, other political parties, etc.). However, in a few of the Labour politicians' tweets, and most notably in Farage's tweets, violent actions are ascribed to the writer or his own party/group. Farage, in particular, identifies with "angry

Brexiters”, states that he “attacks” May, or calls on his supporters to “fight back”. At the same time as anger and violence are legitimised, aggressive action is recommended: “we” are encouraged to adopt an aggressive stance (22) because force is the only answer (23):

(22) The EU has infiltrated our universities. We must fight back against their propaganda machine

(23) If I have learned one thing from nearly 20 years in Brussels it is that the bully boys of the EU Commission only respect one thing: brute force

True to the alpha male stereotypes, Farage revels in his own actions as acts of violence (24, 25):

(24) WATCH: My clash with Tony Blair from 2005

(25) She (May) has refused our repeated offers to slap down Rudd (Amber Rudd, Conservative politician)

Moreover, he seems to be proud of provoking rage in others, asking provocatively (26):

(26) People are outraged I dumped dead fish in the Thames during a Brexit protest. But was I right?

Since Farage habitually constructs his own actions and those of his antagonists as violent (‘elites’ in (27), or the Conservative government in (28)), the overall sensation is of an escalation of violence on both sides, as society moves towards increasingly violent conflict:

(27) We’ve all had enough of billionaire global elites bashing the decision of the British people

(28) Another kick in the teeth for our great Armed Forces

The two Labour politicians are the only others who occasionally adopt an angry stance. Corbyn is angry about: poverty (1), terrorism (1), and transport for commuters (2), while Starmer expresses anger about terrorism (2) and homophobia (1). But neither of these politicians conveys the density or intensity of anger found in the Farage corpus.

5.6 Comparison with other negative emotions: Fear and worry

Although this study centres on anger and violence, it may be useful to contrast the way these appear in the five sub-corpora with the behaviour of two other negatively-loaded emotion areas, namely fear and worry. Graph 9 shows the

emoters of ‘fear’ and synonyms in the five sub-corpora. None of the five stands out particularly; although it is perhaps interesting that Farage introduces ‘British people’ six times as feeling fear. Covert fear is more typical of Corbyn, who often posits a generalised disquiet about social issues (‘horrifying’). Johnson adopts a more personal style overall in his tweets, and so it is not surprising that many of his instances of ‘fear’ are in the first person: as an extrovert with a strong personal style Boris is happy to project his own emotions (‘Shocked by the news’).

Graph 9. Emoter of fear in the five corpora

Graph 10 illustrates the emoters of ‘worry/concern’ in the five corpora. Here, perhaps the most striking feature is the lack of overlap between the emoters of worry in the different corpora. The Labour politicians both prefer covert concern, while Johnson again is keen to express his worries using ‘I’.

Graph 10. Emoter of ‘worry’ in the five corpora

In general, then, the exploration of ‘fear’ and ‘worry’ reveals no noteworthy differences between the five corpora, confirming the initial prediction that ‘anger’ would be more likely to show contrasts between the populist and the others.

6. Conclusions

This study adds to current discussions on the role of anger in contemporary politics. Although mild verbal aggression clearly plays a role in political strategies across the spectrum, it seems that in many countries radical politicians are currently capitalising on the frustrations of particular social groups by bringing anger into the public sphere (Leezenberg 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019). In the case of Farage, we have seen that anger is a recurring feature of his discourse, and that it is carefully presented as “collective anger articulated in public” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019, 92) rather than as a mere personal response. The corpus-based approach allows us to see that Farage makes more frequent use of lexical items denoting anger or violence, contrasting with the other politicians in this study in that his anger/violence: (1) is firmly located in the political sphere; (2) is associated with a wide range of emoters (‘citizens’, ‘you’); (3) is frequently presented covertly (‘anger out there’); (4) is often framed as directed against him or those he represents (‘the hard left are increasingly violent’, ‘EU bully boys’); and (5) can be construed positively or even celebrated (‘watch my attack...’). On the other hand, unlike other radical right politicians studied recently (Brindle and Macmillan 2017; van Leeuwen 2019), Farage makes relatively little explicit use of the semantic areas of ‘fear’ and ‘worry’, leaving such emotions implicit in the notion of ‘attacks’ on the groups he claims to represent.

On the basis of the patterns that have emerged here, we can say that Farage conveys the vision of a society in which violence/anger are to be expected, and are justifiably to be met with violent/angry responses. The accumulation of threats against Farage’s in-group (variously ‘the west’, ‘the armed forces’, ‘citizens’, ‘voters’, ‘us’) is presented to justify anger and violent action against these threats: ‘we’ must ‘fight back’, ‘clash’, or ‘slap (people) down’. His repetitive use of the word ‘bully’ is particularly interesting in this sense: the framing of the EU and its representatives as ‘bullies’ re-contextualises the UK’s dealings with the EU as a street-fight or even a playground battle, in which the ‘victim’ (the UK) is completely justified in using ‘brute force’ because this is the only thing that bullies understand. This metaphor thus legitimises almost any behaviour on the part of the UK, since it is being victimised by powerful bullies. Like victim discourses elsewhere in politics (Berrocal 2017, 104), Farage’s strategy exonerates the ‘victim’ from any responsibility and legitimises violent emotions and actions of all kinds.

This paper also sheds light on the significance of anger as an emotion with negative valence but high power/control, which can act as an impulse to spur people to action. In recent times, anger has been repeatedly associated with radical political movements: for example, in a UK survey, Wagner (2014) found that angry voters were more likely to vote for extremist parties, while frightened voters tended to choose the centre. In the USA, observers have noted that ‘angry populism’ is central to “the emotional regime of the Trump era”, which depends on the “performance of anger as a way of dramatizing grievances” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019, 124). Strong emotions in themselves are crucial in politically operationalising social identities and relations (Ng and Kidder 2010, 211), and by provoking such emotions, adept politicians can channel social discontent, break socio-political hegemonies and achieve change. As in recent examples elsewhere, we may observe that Farage’s utterances are primarily performative: they are not informative, nor are they opinions in the normal sense (Leezenberg 2017, 269). His performance encourages or ‘trains’ disaffected citizens to experience and express their feelings in specific ways. What Farage offers, more than an ideology, is a way of “feeling about the world” – in other words, a new emotional regime (Reddy 2001) that legitimises anger against out-groups and asserts in-group identities and rights. Farage’s instrumentalisation of anger, we could argue, was a driving force in the Brexit campaign (and ongoing controversies), acting to channel the indeterminate negative affect arising from dissatisfaction in various sectors of British society towards definite political goals. The effect of this, we might assume, is particularly powerful on the groups that align with his victim positions: Farage taps into widespread disaffection, and bonds emotionally with increasing sectors of UK society who are disaligned from mainstream parties (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 272, 285). By displacing the focus of public attention from ideas, policies and actions to the realm of affect and performance in these ways, a process that is particularly facilitated by social media, populists like Farage have the potential to change the nature of public life dramatically, with far ranging consequences for western democratic societies.

Finally, regarding methodology, this paper offers an innovative approach which exploits the potential of corpus linguistic techniques, particularly semantic analysis, in order to conduct comparisons between different social media corpora. This technique confirmed the salience of ‘anger/violence’ in Farage’s tweets, and enabled me to discard ‘fear’ and ‘worry’ as significant markers of his populist style. However, qualitative analysis was essential to avoid drawing false conclusions and to bring out the discursive impact of the patterns detected quantitatively. Future corpus-based studies of larger corpora will doubtlessly uncover many more aspects of the way emotion colours discourse and shed greater light on its importance in political communication styles.

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