

## Article

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# Emotional Reactions to Protective Policies on the Political Spectrum

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**Abstract:** The need for safety is one of the basic human needs. States implement different protective policies to fulfil the task of granting safety to their citizens. Aim of the present study conducted online on a representative sample of Polish citizens ( $N = 1,124$ ), was to explore emotions potentially evoked by seven protective policies in the areas of: the economy, social welfare, health, personal security from crime and terrorism, one's own way of life, tradition and culture of the country, as well as climate and environment. It also examined the relationship between emotional responses to protective policies across these different policy areas and the political orientation of participants, together with their socio-demographic characteristics. The results showed that emotions evoked by protective policies vary across areas of protection. Only four emotions (discouragement, anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction) were indicated by more than 10 % of adult Poles in all areas of protection. Age of respondents was the most systematic predictor for all policies. Although there were general trends in emotional reactions to all policies, there were also area-specific emotions and their predictors. These include policy-specific emotions such as grief in the area of economy, despair in the area of healthcare (with gender and political orientation as predictors), and pride in the area of protecting traditions and culture in Poland (with political orientation as a predictor). Protective policy regarding climate was the only one that evoked only negative emotions. The area of economy was the one with the largest number of different emotions indicated.

**Keywords:** emotions; economy; protection; protective policies

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# 1 Introduction

The need for safety, such as safety from assault and chaos, is one of the basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Hagerty 1999; Maslow 1943). States, as they are perceived as responsible for protecting their citizens' safety in various areas, implement different policies – defined as any governing principle, plan, or course of action (Blau and Abramovitz 2010) – to fulfill this task. These policies may evoke different emotions based on their topic, as well as on whether they fulfill citizens' needs and how they are perceived. In this paper, we examine the emotions people feel regarding policies in various areas of protection. We demonstrate how individuals from diverse demographic groups emotionally respond to policies related to protection, as well as patterns of emotional responses across various policy areas.

Whether a policy is considered protective depends on its qualitative characteristics (Stempel and Wenzelburger 2024). Protective policies can encompass a wide range of areas, including social protection (e.g., Jensen and Wenzelburger 2020), environmental protection (e.g., Panwar et al. 2011), and protection from crime (e.g., Zahnow et al. 2021). Such policies contribute to long-term national security by addressing social inequalities and reducing the risks of political instability (Mares 2005). Furthermore, their implementation plays a crucial role in shaping societal stability, reducing vulnerability to crises, and increasing public trust in governmental institutions (Albertson and Gadarian 2015).

Following Waldron (2006), and Starke and colleagues (2025), we see protective policies as related to at least three types of insecurities: 1. Physical insecurities (connected, e.g., to public health crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, war, violent crimes); 2. socio-economic insecurities (linked, e.g., to structural inequalities or crises affecting the living conditions); and 3. cultural insecurities (caused, e.g., by immigration, more liberal or more conservative gender policies, or value changes). These insecurities may be explained by the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan et al. 2000; Stephan and Stephan 2000): a) realistic threat consisting of threats to the very existence of the in-group, its political and economic power, and threats to the physical well-being of the in-group or its members (e.g., anxiety that immigrants might take jobs and social welfare from citizens, or assault and rape women), and b) symbolic threat, based on value differences (e.g., between a host country and immigrants).

Since protective policies directly impact the lives of both citizens and non-citizens, they can evoke strong emotional reactions. However, perceptions of protective policies are not uniform. While some policies, such as welfare programs, are widely seen as protective, others – such as immigration or climate policies – may be perceived differently depending on political and social perspectives. Some view the former as necessary protections for national security and economic stability, while

others see them as exclusionary measures that reinforce societal divisions (Vogel 2003). This is particularly relevant in polarized societies, such as Poland, where the framing of policies as protective may influence public perception and political attitudes. Building on this understanding, the present study examines the relationship between emotional responses to protective policies across different policy areas and the political orientation of participants, as well as their socio-demographic characteristics.

## 1.1 Emotions as a Response to Protective Policies

Emotions are a key factor in political decision-making, shaping policy support, public perception, and elite discourse, which in turn influence voting behavior (Banks 2014; Valentino et al. 2011). One of the theories explaining the role of emotions in politics is the Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT), which argues that emotions help individuals manage political attention (Marcus et al. 2011; Stempel and Wenzelburger 2024). AIT distinguishes between two systems: the disposition system, which governs familiar situations, and the surveillance system, which reacts to new or uncertain stimuli (Marcus 2003). Different emotions are associated with distinct political behaviors, such as policy learning (Lablih et al. 2024) and support for radical parties (Jacobs et al. 2024).

In the context of protective policies, emotions play a crucial role not only in shaping individual responses but also in the way these policies are framed in anticipation of certain emotional responses from citizens. Emotions may be strategically elicited by political actors to create a window of opportunity, where certain policies can be put on the agenda with expected support (Loseke 2009; Zahariadis 2015). However, the issue of how citizens emotionally respond to various protective policies is still understudied (Stempel 2025). The current research aims to fill in this gap.

According to Albertson and Gadarian (2015), emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger shape threat perception, influencing whether an issue is seen as a security concern. Fear, for example, has been shown to increase support for protective policies designed to mitigate perceived risks, while anger often fuels opposition to such measures (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Wagner and Morisi 2019). Moreover, whereas certain policies may be seen as enhancing the security of some groups (e.g., restrictive immigration rules), they may instill negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, or shame among other groups (Stempel 2025).

The relationship between emotions and protective policies is particularly evident in crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fear and sadness, but not anger, were strongly linked to higher support for protective health measures (Merrolla et al.

2023; Renström and Bäck 2021; Vasilopoulos et al. 2023). Similarly, fear of terrorism or crime has been associated with greater public acceptance of restrictive security measures (Vasilopoulos et al. 2023). However, the effectiveness of emotional appeals depends on individual predispositions and political beliefs, which shape how people interpret policy proposals (Gadarian and Brader 2023).

Moreover, political orientation influences how emotions are used by political actors to gain support for protective policies. Different political groups intentionally evoke specific emotions to align with their audience's concerns (Zahariadis 2015). Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, fear proved capable of overriding partisanship, leading individuals to support protective policies regardless of the political party advocating them (see e.g., Mehlhaff et al. 2024). It suggests that not only the distinction between positive and negative emotions but also their specific nature plays a role in the political process.

We hypothesize that protective policies will elicit emotional responses from individuals that will depend on their political orientations and demographic characteristics. We examine protective policies in areas of the economy, social welfare, health, personal security from crime and terrorism, one's own way of life, the country's tradition and culture, as well as climate and environment. Since emotions toward protective policies do not exist in a vacuum, but are instead directly linked to existing policies, it is important to understand the current protective policies in Poland, where the present study was conducted.

## 1.2 Protective Policies in Poland

**Economy.** Ensuring economic security is one of the key responsibilities of every state, as it guarantees the stability of both the country and the economic well-being of its citizens (Modzelewska and Grodzka 2021). Strategies for achieving this goal include taxation of individuals and businesses, promoting GDP growth, and regulating international trade through tariffs (Brück 2004; Modzelewska and Grodzka 2021). Taxes fund essential public services, such as education, healthcare, and security, yet attitudes toward taxation vary depending on perceptions of government trustworthiness and spending efficiency (Thornton et al. 2019). Poland, where trust in governmental institutions is low (Cybulska 2024), presents a case where tax increases face strong opposition, with many preferring reductions in government spending instead (Roguska 2024) while simultaneously wanting social benefits (Roguska 2024).

A significant economic challenge arose following the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 when the Polish government imposed embargoes on Russian imports, including gas. While these measures were meant as a geopolitical response, they contributed to rising energy prices, triggering inflation and posing risks to economic

stability (Gradzewicz et al. 2024). Both tax policies and inflationary pressures linked to energy costs have fueled public dissatisfaction (Modzelewska and Grodzka 2021; Maison 2024), reflecting growing frustration with state economic management and a preference for fiscal restraint over higher taxation. Although the ruling party has changed after the latest elections (October 2023), we can expect frustration among Polish citizens with how the state manages economic stability and a preference for fiscal restraint over higher taxation.

**Social welfare.** Social welfare can be defined as organized public or private social services for the assistance of disadvantaged groups (Meriam-Webster dictionary n.d.). Social welfare policies are usually highly controversial (thus probably encompassing strong emotions) since they involve “political conflicts over the nature and causes of, and solutions to social and economic problems” (Blau and Abramovitz 2010, p. 19). Moreover, it is about the distribution of limited resources from one group to another, which can cause conflicts (Blau and Abramovitz 2010). Each country has its own specific approach to this area of protection. In Poland, PiS, the former ruling party that governed until 2023, introduced multiple social benefits, including lowering the retirement age to 60 for women and 65 for men, and introducing benefits for parents (the 500+ program; Meardi and Guardancich 2022), and additional money transfers for retirees. To avoid public protests, they were not cancelled by the new government after the 2023 elections. These programs seem to divide society. As noted above, a large portion of Polish society believes that the Polish government should spend less money, with over a quarter of adult Poles wanting the state to spend less on monetary support for families and 11 % on other social welfare programs. At the same time, 15 % and 9 % of Poles, respectively, believe that spending in these areas should not be lowered (Roguska 2024). Moreover, a significant increase in the percentage of Ukrainian migrants in Poland after the Russian invasion in 2022 led to higher expenses for the state to support them, which caused dissatisfaction among some Poles (Hargrave et al. 2023). This means that different, but substantial, groups can be found, where emotions toward social welfare would vary considerably.

**Health.** Numerous opinion polls systematically show that health is the most important value for Poles, before family, money, or work (e.g., Kwiatkowska 2024). It is the most important source of happiness, and illness is perceived as the biggest threat (Steptoe 2019). Its protection is fundamental in the life of every human, and many states, including Poland, aim to provide it for their inhabitants. In Poland, there is a public healthcare system that is funded through taxes. This way, theoretically, it is accessible to everyone living and paying taxes (also for the registered unemployed) in the country. However, there is a high level of discontent among society regarding health protection in Poland due to the higher needs of citizens compared to the available doctors in the public sector, causing extremely long

waiting times (sometimes months or even years to get to see a specialist), complex administrative procedures, and focus rather on treating than preventing diseases (Mika 2022). It may lead to negative emotions, especially in those who are more medically vulnerable, like older people. Another issue that may evoke emotions regarding health policies in Poland is the discussion around reproductive rights and healthcare provided to women, especially if they are pregnant. Poland has one of the strictest regulations around abortion in Europe (Rak and Skrzypek 2024), and there are multiple stories in the media about women who were denied help and even died due to harsh laws protecting a fetus introduced by the former ruling party. Discussions and street protests around these topics are very heated, with multiple women voicing strongly negative emotions, with anger being the leading one (Hussein et al. 2018). Thus, it is possible that some women (and their families) will associate the topic of healthcare in Poland with struggles around their reproductive rights and react with negative emotions to the system in general.

**Security from Physical Crime and Terrorism.** As Friedrichs (2015) notes, crime is often understood as violations of criminal law, such as theft, assault, and murder. However, in the context of the current study, we focus on potential physical harm and consider crime in terms of victimization and its avoidance, as these aspects evoke the strongest emotional responses. The literature predominantly discusses security in terms of the absence of crime, often referring to the perception of security or lack thereof as anxiety or fear of crime (Socha 2021). Siemaszko (2001) found that gender is a significant factor, with women reporting higher levels of fear – a pattern often attributed to concerns about sexual assault, which may extend to fears of other types of crime (Gruszczyńska 2007). Kristjansson (2007) further observed that people living in urban areas tend to be more concerned about crime, while Mider (2021) found that perceived wealth and higher education levels correlate with greater fear of crime. Taken together, these findings suggest that demographic variables play a strong role in shaping emotional responses to crime and, consequently, attitudes toward protective policies in this area. Additionally, De Angelis et al. (2017) demonstrate that political conservatism is associated with feeling less secure and having less trust in the police, which may influence differences in the strength and nature of emotions experienced in response to protective policies related to crime.

Opinion polls from 2023 show that 96 % of Poles consider their living environment safe, and 88 % consider Poland a safe country to live in (Bożewicz 2023). Most Poles (83 %) have not been victims of any crime in the last five years. Among the rest, the largest number have experienced theft (12 %, the same as in 2022), with only 2 % being a victim of intentional injury or assault, and 2 % being attacked and robbed (Badora 2023, Bożewicz 2023).

Regarding terrorism, the latest statistics provided by Europol (2022) for the years 2019–2021 showed that Poland had no terrorist attacks, and only three suspects

arrested, compared to many more in countries like France, Germany, or Spain. Thus, we do not expect the topic of terrorism to be salient in Poles' minds in response to this policy. We suspect that respondents will focus more on crime, but as Poles generally feel safe, we do not expect strong emotions to be connected to this type of protective policies.

**Tradition and culture of Poland.** Poles cherish their traditions and culture, with many celebrations being part of Polish social life (Marteklas 2020). Focus on Polish history and traditional values were strongly promoted by the former Polish governments from 2015 until the last elections in 2023, but with nationalist and populist stances (e.g., toward the European Union, immigration, and refugees, and so-called "European values;" Meardi and Guardiancich 2022). They tried to overtake the discourse on Polishness and forced a position that only people thinking like them are "true Poles." Due to a significant polarization in Poland (which, according to the Digital Society Project, has risen by 41 % between 2001 and 2021; FNW), the topic of protection of tradition and culture may thus evoke various emotions on different political spectrums.

**Own way of life.** The freedom to live their own way of life is important for many people, also in Poland. The protection of privacy and freedom is included in the Polish constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997). All citizens have the right to the freedom to maintain and develop one's own language, to maintain customs and traditions, and to develop one's own culture. However, for the former ruling party and its supporters, not all ways of life were acceptable. Eight years of anti-LGBT + campaigns caused a lot of people to feel they, and their ways of life, are not accepted in society (Podgórska 2023). Also, the aforementioned war against so-called "European values" and alleged gender conspiracy (Marchlewska et al. 2019) caused even bigger polarization in Polish society and strengthened the feeling that not all ways of life are equal. In the 2023 parliamentary elections, which preceded the current study, the former opposition won on a platform of liberal reforms, including greater protections for LGBTQ + rights, liberalized access to abortion, and a reduced role of the Catholic Church in public institutions. Similar to the topic of protection of tradition and culture, protection of the freedom to live one's own way of life may thus cause various emotions, depending on the position on the political spectrum.

**Climate.** Climate change is becoming increasingly visible in Poland, with severe heat waves, droughts, and floods being more and more common (Wyligala 2023). Over time, Poland has committed to multiple international agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1994 and the Kyoto Protocol in 2002 (Sówka et al. 2021). As a member of the European Union, Poland has also pledged to achieve climate neutrality by 2050; however, this goal remains contested by both policymakers and the general public (Roguska 2023). Despite regulatory frameworks, the country remains heavily reliant on coal as its primary energy

source, which continues to receive active support from national policies. On the one hand, Photovoltaics is becoming more common, on the other, the development of wind energy has been significantly hindered by restrictive regulations from the former ruling party, such as minimum distance requirements that make new investments impractical. At the same time, deforestation remains a pressing issue, as the National Forest Agency prioritizes timber sales over conservation, leading to the degradation of Poland's natural carbon sinks (Sówka et al. 2021).

Opinion polls from 2023 (Roguska 2023) showed that more than half of Poles believe that Poland should not strive for climate neutrality by 2050 but rather achieve it at its own pace. Only 17 % support reaching climate neutrality by 2050, and 21 % even earlier. However, the majority of Poles are in favor of replacing coal with alternative energy sources. Despite this, only 31 % of adults support the development of renewable energy sources. Based on these results, it can be speculated that younger, more educated, wealthier individuals from larger cities, as well as women, are more inclined to support climate protection efforts. This pattern aligns with findings from other countries. The emotional reactions to climate policies are often shaped by political ideology, as Maj (2024) observes, noting that people's attitudes toward climate change and protective measures are influenced by their political orientation. Conservative individuals, typically associated with right-wing views, tend to perceive climate change as a natural phenomenon, largely unrelated to human activities. In contrast, individuals with liberal or left-wing beliefs tend to recognize climate change as a human-driven crisis and, therefore, support more decisive mitigation policies. This ideological divide is further evidenced by the opinion polls, where individuals on the political left are shown to favour a faster transition to renewable energy compared to those on the right (Roguska 2023). Based on these results, it can be speculated that for people on the right side of the political spectrum, protective policies may evoke negative emotions such as anger and contempt, as they may see such policies as threatening economic growth or individual freedom. For those on the political left, on the other hand, emotional responses to these policies can range from hope and optimism (if the policies are viewed as effective) to fear, sadness, and despair (if the policies or their adoption are seen as insufficient).

### 1.3 The Current Study

The current study explores emotional responses to protective policies across seven different areas. First, we examine the extent to which adult Poles experience 27 distinct emotions in relation to these policy areas. Next, we investigate how demographic factors predict the intensity of the most frequently reported emotions.



Finally, we analyze response patterns using Latent Profile Analysis and assess demographic predictors for each identified profile.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Participants and Procedure

The nationwide sample consisted of 1,124 adult Poles, ranging in age from 18 to 83 years ( $M = 47.76$ ,  $SD = 15.30$ ); 54 % were female. Data collection, using the CAWI method, was conducted online by the nationwide Ariadna Research Panel (<http://www.panelariadna.com>), which has over 300,000 registered verified online users. The panel employs quota sampling to create a representative sample of the Polish adult population based on gender, age, and place of residence. Participants responded to the online survey and were rewarded with points that could be exchanged for gifts. The study was conducted as part of an Omnibus study.

The vast majority of the sample voted in the last parliamentary elections, with 26.2 % having voted for Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Order – a former populist ruling party) and its satellites, while 39.8 % voted for the currently ruling coalition (Koalicja Obywatelska – Citizen Coalition).

### 2.2 Measures

**Emotions toward protective policies** were measured (in a randomized order) in seven areas: “When you think about the quality of protection the state provides in these areas, how does it make you feel? Please select only the emotions you feel and indicate how strongly you feel them.” “When I think about the quality of protection of: my economic security/of myself by the welfare system/my health/my physical security against crime and terrorism/my way of life/tradition and culture of Poland/ climate and environment, I feel:...” and then 26 emotions were listed to choose from: happiness, pride, enthusiasm, satisfaction, compassion, gratitude, curiosity, calmness, optimism, joy, discouragement, hope, fear, anxiety, shame, sadness, contempt, anger, envy, disgust, disappointment, guilt, hate, despair, nostalgia, grief, and dissatisfaction. If participants marked any of them, they were then asked to rate the intensity of this emotion on a scale from 1 (*a little*) to 5 (*to a high degree*). For analytical purposes, no indication of a certain emotion was recoded as a value of 0 on the intensity scale.

**Political orientation** (PO) was measured with two questions:

- General PO: *When talking about politics, people describe themselves as “left-wing” or “right-wing.” Imagine a 7-point scale where 1 means “definitely left-wing” and 7 means “definitely right-wing.” Which point on the scale would best describe your views and beliefs?*
- Socio-cultural PO: *When talking about moral views (e.g., attitudes towards divorce, homosexuality, or abortion), people describe themselves as “conservative” or “liberal”. Imagine a 7-point scale, where 1 means “definitely liberal” and 7 means “definitely conservative”. Which point on the scale would best describe your views and beliefs?*

**Demographics** included gender (coded as 1 – female, 2 – male), age, size of place of residence (coded as 1 – village; 2 – small city (less than 20,000 inhabitants); 3 – medium city (20,000–99,000 inhabitants); 4 – large city (100,000–500,000 inhabitants); 5 – very large city (500,000+ inhabitants), education (coded as 1 – elementary school; 2 – vocational training; 3 – high school; 4 – higher education) and subjective income (“how do you, generally, evaluate economic situation of your family?” coded as 1 - very bad to 7 - very good) - all asked with 1 item.

### 3 Results

First, the basic statistics were calculated, including the percentages of respondents indicating each emotion for every policy, the mean strength of each emotion among all participants (Table 1), and the mean strength of each emotion, but only among participants who reported experiencing it (Table 2).

Results showed that the same four emotions were indicated by more than 10 % participants as reactions to all policies: anxiety, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and discouragement. The other indicated emotions varied between policies.

In the area of protective policies regarding the **economy**, the three most frequently reported emotions were anxiety (34.4 %), disappointment (27.1 %), and dissatisfaction (24.7 %). Other negative emotions were discouragement (18.3 %), fear (17.1 %), anger (12.3 %), sadness (13.1 %), and grief (10.7 %). However, it also evoked positive emotions of hope (19.9 %), calmness (15.6 %), optimism (12.8 %), and satisfaction (10.8 %).

A similar pattern was observed for protective policies regarding **social welfare**, with the same three most frequently reported emotions: anxiety (25.7 %), disappointment (23.9 %), and dissatisfaction (23.2 %). Other negative emotions were discouragement (11.9 %), fear (14.1 %), and sadness (12.1 %). However, it also evoked positive emotions of joy (16.2 %) and calmness (11.7 %).

Table 1: Percentages and means of emotions felt regarding protective policies.

	Economy		Social welfare		Health		Security from crime and terrorism		Way of life		Tradition and culture		Climate	
	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M
Happiness	6.1	0.25	3.8	0.16	5.1	0.21	6.2	0.26	6.0	0.26	6.5	0.27	3.6	0.14
Pride	4.5	0.18	3.5	0.13	3.8	0.17	3.5	0.15	4.4	0.18	15.2	0.65	2.0	0.08
Enthusiasm	3.2	0.12	3.5	0.13	3.1	0.13	3.5	0.15	5.6	0.23	4.6	0.20	3.4	0.134
Satisfaction	10.8	0.44	6.2	0.26	8.0	0.32	8.7	0.37	11.6	0.48	14.2	0.57	5.6	0.24
Compassion	1.6	0.06	2.3	0.10	2.5	0.10	1.0	0.04	1.4	0.06	1.6	0.06	2.2	0.10
Gratitude	5.8	0.24	5.7	0.24	5.8	0.24	9.1	0.38	5.4	0.22	8.1	0.34	3.9	0.16
Curiosity	7.4	0.29	5.0	0.19	3.6	0.13	4.5	0.17	7.3	0.29	9.0	0.34	9.1	0.37
Calmness	15.6	0.62	11.7	0.46	11.1	0.46	18.7	0.75	16.9	0.67	14.6	0.60	8.5	0.33
Optimism	12.8	0.50	8.1	0.31	8.4	0.33	12.5	0.49	12.1	0.49	13.4	0.56	9.7	0.38
Joy	6.2	0.25	16.2	0.70	16.7	0.71	6.3	0.26	7.8	0.33	4.9	0.20	9.2	0.39
Discourage-ment	18.3	0.76	11.9	0.47	13.4	0.53	15.0	0.59	12.9	0.53	14.2	0.57	15.0	0.61
Hope	19.9	0.77	4.3	0.17	4.5	0.20	4.5	0.18	7.2	0.30	6.5	0.28	4.3	0.17
Fear	17.1	0.69	14.1	0.61	19.5	0.85	16.0	0.69	6.1	0.25	4.7	0.20	8.5	0.37
Anxiety	34.4	1.38	25.7	1.08	32.2	1.35	28.0	1.15	15.4	0.62	13.1	0.54	24.6	1.03
Shame	8.0	0.33	5.7	0.25	6.1	0.26	3.1	0.14	1.6	0.07	7.2	0.32	7.9	0.33
Sadness	13.1	0.53	12.1	0.52	14.1	0.59	7.0	0.30	7.0	0.30	7.6	0.32	10.5	0.44
Contempt	5.1	0.23	3.1	0.14	3.8	0.17	1.7	0.08	1.5	0.07	1.9	0.08	3.2	0.14
Anger	12.3	0.51	8.7	0.40	14.7	0.63	6.7	0.31	3.8	0.16	6.0	0.27	6.7	0.31
Envy	1.5	0.05	0.8	0.03	1.0	0.04	0.2	0.01	0.9	0.03	0.4	0.02	0.7	0.02
Disgust	4.1	0.18	3.1	0.14	3.5	0.16	1.8	0.08	1.6	0.07	2.3	0.09	3.0	0.13
Disappoint-ment	27.1	1.15	23.9	1.04	28.3	1.24	11.6	0.50	11.9	0.51	11.1	0.49	17.2	0.74
Guilt	1.0	0.04	1.1	0.04	0.5	0.02	0.3	0.01	1.6	0.06	1.3	0.05	3.4	0.13

Table 1: (continued)

	Economy		Social welfare		Health		Security from crime and terrorism		Way of life		Tradition and culture		Climate	
	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M	%	M
Hate	3.1	0.13	2.5	0.11	3.0	0.13	2.5	0.11	2.0	0.09	1.7	0.07	1.9	0.08
Despair	7.6	0.32	8.3	0.37	19.6	0.47	3.5	0.16	2.7	0.12	3.4	0.14	5.1	0.22
Nostalgia	2.6	0.09	1.7	0.07	1.9	0.07	1.5	0.05	3.9	0.14	7.0	0.29	1.6	0.05
Grief	10.7	0.46	7.5	0.33	8.0	0.35	3.1	0.14	2.9	0.13	5.2	0.22	4.9	0.21
Dissatisfaction	24.7	1.08	23.2	1.00	27.4	1.21	13.8	0.61	12.4	0.54	11.3	0.49	18.9	0.81

**Table 2:** Means of emotions regarding protective policies among participants who felt them (i.e. means with “zero” responses excluded).

	Economy	Social welfare	Health	Security from crime and terrorism	Own way of life	Tradition and culture	Climate
Happiness	4.10	4.08	4.11	4.18	4.26	4.11	4.04
Pride	4.07	3.88	4.49	4.19	4.04	4.32	4.13
Enthusiasm	3.89	3.75	4.14	4.14	4.04	4.28	4.25
Satisfaction	4.09	4.26	4.02	4.21	4.13	4.04	4.17
Compassion	3.52	4.12	4.03	4.34	4.14	3.86	4.29
Gratitude	4.17	4.16	4.21	4.17	4.18	4.18	4.10
Curiosity	3.95	3.82	3.74	3.85	4.01	3.82	4.08
Calmness	3.94	3.94	4.10	4.00	3.98	4.10	3.93
Optimism	3.87	3.85	3.89	3.97	4.02	4.16	3.89
Joy	3.98	4.31	4.25	4.18	4.25	4.04	4.23
Discouragement	4.14	3.93	3.96	3.95	4.11	4.00	4.06
Hope	3.88	3.98	4.36	4.11	4.16	4.31	3.86
Fear	4.02	4.32	4.36	4.32	4.03	4.26	4.34
Anxiety	4.02	4.20	4.21	4.10	4.01	4.15	4.19
Shame	4.12	4.42	4.31	4.62	4.54	4.40	4.23
Sadness	4.05	4.31	4.21	4.33	4.25	4.23	4.17
Contempt	4.43	4.33	4.45	4.67	4.79	4.33	4.34
Anger	4.18	4.56	4.30	4.57	4.14	4.56	4.54
Envy	3.56	4.07	4.19	3.70	3.44	3.94	3.22
Disgust	4.42	4.31	4.50	4.22	4.29	3.89	4.52
Disappointment	4.26	4.36	4.39	4.37	4.30	4.42	4.31
Guilt	3.94	3.91	4.31	4.06	3.87	3.80	3.71
Hate	4.20	4.41	4.44	4.46	4.40	4.23	4.33
Despair	4.16	4.46	4.47	4.49	4.28	4.24	4.26
Nostalgia	3.52	3.96	3.51	3.56	3.62	4.20	3.40
Grief	4.31	4.36	4.43	4.49	4.25	4.26	4.30
Dissatisfaction	4.36	4.32	4.42	4.38	4.37	4.35	4.28

Again, the same three most frequently reported emotions were picked for protective policies regarding **health**: anxiety (32.2 %), disappointment (28.3 %), and dissatisfaction (27.4 %). Other negative emotions included despair (19.6 %), and it was the only policy that evoked this emotion among more than 10 % respondents, but there were also fear (19.5 %), anger (14.7 %), sadness (14.1 %), and discouragement (13.4 %). However, protective policies regarding health also evoked positive emotions of joy (16.7 %) and calmness (11.1 %).

In the area of protective policies regarding **security from crime and terrorism**, again, anxiety (28 %) was the most frequently indicated. For other emotions, the percentages did not exceed 20 %. However, it is worth noting that it evoked mixed feelings as 16 % of respondents also indicated fear, 15 % - discouragement, 13.8 % - dissatisfaction, and 11.6 % - disappointment, but 18.7 % indicated calmness and 12.5 % - optimism.

Protection of **one's own way of life** and protection of **traditions and culture of Poland** were the only two policies where a positive (and not negative) emotion was indicated the most frequently (assuming cut off above 10 % of participants). They were also the only ones that none of the emotions were picked by more than 20 % of participants.

In the case of protection of **one's own way of life**, calmness was picked by 16.9 % of respondents. Other positive emotions were satisfaction (11.6 %) and optimism (12.1 %). However, it also evoked negative emotions of anxiety (15.4 %), discouragement (12.9 %), dissatisfaction (12.4 %), and disappointment (11.9 %).

Regarding **traditions and culture of Poland**, positive emotions were the most often indicated, were pride (15.2 %), satisfaction (14.2 %), calmness (14.6 %), and, a bit less frequently, optimism (13.4 %). However, it also evoked negative emotions: discouragement (14.2 %), anxiety (13.1 %), disappointment (11.1 %), and dissatisfaction (11.3 %).

Protective policies regarding **climate and environment** evoked mostly anxiety (24.6 %), but also dissatisfaction (18.9 %), disappointment (17.2 %), and discouragement (15 %). It was the only area of policies that evoked only negative emotions (assuming cut off above 10 % of participants).

Interestingly, when examining mean intensity scores for emotions among participants who declared experiencing them (so when 0 was not included, see Table 2), most of the chosen emotions were experienced at high levels ( $M > 4.0$  on a 5-point scale), suggesting that when respondents experience an emotion toward a certain policy, it is a rather strong reaction.

It is worth noting that over a third of emotions were reported by fewer than 10 % of respondents in any of the researched areas and were therefore not analyzed. These were: happiness, enthusiasm, compassion, gratitude, curiosity, shame, contempt, envy, disgust, guilt, hate, and nostalgia.

In the next step, linear regressions were conducted to study predictors of emotions, including political orientations and socio-demographics (see Table 3). The cut-off for emotions was at least 10 % of indications. This threshold was chosen to ensure interpretability of the results and was driven by the study methodology. We focused on emotions that were experienced by at least a sizable minority of participants in a given domain. Participants did not react to all listed emotions, but were only picking the ones relevant to them and then evaluating how strongly they felt

them, receiving a value of zero for the rest. Including emotions with smaller percentages of indications would drastically decrease the variance in the strength of emotions (to close to 0), making the analyses impossible. While arbitrary, this threshold balances parsimony and salience, avoiding the noise from rarely endorsed emotions. In the case of regressions, lowering this threshold would also substantially increase the number of analyses, vastly expanding the length of the paper. Moreover, the variance of the predicted variables would be too low, which would diminish the explanatory power of the regressions.

For protective policies regarding the **economy**, the results suggested that:

- Satisfaction and optimism were marginally stronger among men.
- Calmness (marginally) and hope were higher among older and less educated participants.
- Discouragement was stronger among more educated people, and from larger cities (only marginally for this group).
- Fear was more prevalent among women and younger individuals (marginally).
- Anxiety was reported more among women and more educated people, as well as those on the political right (marginally).
- Anger was only marginally related to the conservative end of the political orientation spectrum and lower subjective income.
- Disappointment and dissatisfaction were marginally stronger among older and more educated people.
- Sadness exceeded 10 % of indications, but was not predicted by any of the variables included in the model.
- Generally, negative emotions were marginally stronger among more educated people.
- Generally, positive emotions were marginally stronger among men and those with less education.

For protective policies regarding **social welfare**, the results (see Table 4) suggested that:

- Calmness was felt marginally more often by people from poorer households.
- Discouragement was only marginally related to older age.
- Joy and calmness, as well as fear and sadness, were marginally stronger among women than among men.
- Anxiety was felt marginally more by older and more educated people.
- Disappointment was marginally more often felt by women and people from poorer households.
- Dissatisfaction was felt to a greater extent by older people.
- Generally, negative emotions (in total) were not predicted by any variable in the model.

**Table 3:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding the economy.

	GPO	S-C PO	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Satisfaction	0.01	-0.04	0.01	0.08*	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	1.14	0.01
Calmness	0.02	-0.03	0.07*	0.06	0.03	-0.07*	-0.06	3.18***	0.02
Optimism	-0.06	0.05	0.06	0.08**	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	2.25*	0.01
Discouragement	0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	0.07*	0.13***	-0.04	3.95***	0.02
Hope	0.02	-0.04	0.10***	0.02	-0.02	-0.08*	-0.05	3.70***	0.02
Fear	-0.01	0.03	-0.10***	-0.08**	0.01	0.02	0.01	3.29***	0.02
Anxiety	0.09*	-0.07	0.02	-0.10***	-0.05	0.11***	-0.01	4.63***	0.03
Sadness	-0.07	0.05	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	0.06	-0.03	1.20	0.01
Anger	0.06	0.09*	-0.004	0.04	0.04	0.004	-0.07*	4.11***	0.03
Disappointment	0.04	0.03	0.08*	-0.01	0.01	0.10**	0.02	2.95**	0.02
Dissatisfaction	0.07	-0.04	0.09**	-0.03	-0.04	0.07*	-0.05	3.00**	0.02
Negative emotions in total	0.05	0.04	-0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.08**	-0.04	2.17*	0.01
Positive emotions in total	0.07	-0.05	0.03	0.08**	0.01	-0.07*	-0.06	3.49**	0.02

N = 1,124, \*\*\*p < 0.001 \*\*p < 0.01 \*p < 0.05. GPO = general political orientation; S-C PO = socio-cultural political orientation.



- Generally, positive emotions were higher among people from poorer households.

For protective policies regarding **health**, the results (see Table 5) suggested that:

- Calmness was felt marginally more by men and people from poorer households.
- Joy was marginally stronger among more educated people.
- Discouragement was reported more among older and less educated people (marginally).
- Fear was marginally stronger among women.
- Anxiety was also marginally stronger among women and older people.
- Sadness was marginally stronger among older people.
- Anger was reported as marginally stronger by older and more educated individuals, as well as those living in smaller cities and villages.
- Disappointment was stronger among older respondents, and marginally stronger among more educated people and women.
- Despair was stronger among women (marginally) and among people on the political right (but not more conservative socio-culturally).
- Dissatisfaction was stronger among older and more educated people (here only marginally), as well as those on the liberal end of the spectrum.
- Generally, negative emotions were marginally stronger among older and more educated people.
- Generally, positive emotions were marginally stronger among younger people and men.

In the area of protective policies regarding **security from crime and terrorism**, results (see Table 6) suggested that:

- Calmness was stronger among more liberal individuals, and marginally stronger among women, as well as people from larger cities and those who were less educated.
- Optimism was marginally stronger among men than women and older people.
- Discouragement was reported more by older people.
- Fear was stronger among women.
- Anxiety was stronger among women (marginally) and older people.
- Disappointment was marginally stronger among people from poorer households.
- Dissatisfaction was stronger among older and more educated people (marginally).
- Generally, negative emotions were stronger among older individuals, socio-culturally conservative respondents, and marginally stronger among those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Table 4:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding social welfare.

	GPO	S-C PO	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Calmness	0.02	-0.06	0.003	0.07*	0.04	-0.06	-0.07*	2.65*	0.02
Joy	0.05	-0.06	0.02	-0.09*	-0.004	0.05	-0.06	2.69**	0.02
Discouragement	-0.003	-0.004	0.06*	0.04	0.01	-0.05	0	1.30	0.01
Fear	0.02	-0.01	-0.004	-0.08**	-0.01	0.05	0.05	1.91	0.01
Anxiety	-0.01	0.003	0.08*	-0.04	0.01	0.09**	0.01	2.83**	0.02
Sadness	-0.05	0.02	0.04	-0.07*	-0.01	-0.01	0.001	1.45	0.01
Disappointment	-0.01	-0.04	0.03	-0.09**	-0.003	0.06	-0.07*	3.38**	0.02
Dissatisfaction	0.07	-0.05	0.11***	-0.01	-0.04	0.05	-0.03	3.24**	0.02
Negative emotions in total	-0.002	-0.01	0.05	-0.05	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	1.09	0.01
Positive emotions in total	0.05	-0.02	-0.05	0.05	0.02	-0.02	-0.11***	3.02**	0.02

N = 1,124; \*\*\*p < 0.001 \*\*p < 0.01 \*p < 0.05 GPO, general political orientation; S-C PO, socio-cultural political orientation.

**Table 5:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding health.

	GPO	S-C PON	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Calmness	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.07*	0.02	-0.06	-0.08*	2.32*	0.01
Joy	-0.06	-0.02	0.01	-0.01	-0.02	0.09**	-0.01	2.55*	0.02
Discouragement	-0.01	-0.03	0.11***	0.05	0.02	-0.08*	-0.04	4.39***	0.03
Fear	0.04	0.03	0	-0.06*	-0.03	0.04	-0.02	1.47	0.01
Anxiety	-0.02	-0.04	0.09**	-0.08**	-0.01	0.04	0	3.48***	0.02
Sadness	0.04	-0.05	0.08**	-0.02	-0.01	0.04	-0.05	2.08*	0.01
Anger	0.03	-0.06	0.06*	-0.03	-0.06*	0.08**	-0.01	2.50*	0.02
Disappointment	-0.01	-0.03	0.11***	-0.07*	-0.01	0.07*	0.02	4.06***	0.03
Despair	0.10*	-0.04	0.03	-0.08**	-0.04	0.02	-0.02	2.25*	0.01
Dissatisfaction	0.07	-0.10***	0.13***	-0.01	-0.01	0.08**	0.02	5.07***	0.03
Negative emotions in total	0.02	-0.04	0.08**	-0.03	-0.03	0.06*	-0.02	2.21*	0.01
Positive emotions in total	0.01	0.01	-0.07*	0.09**	0.02	-0.02	-0.08*	3.17**	0.02

*N* = 1,124, \*\*\**p* < 0.001 \*\**p* < 0.01 \**p* < 0.05. GPO, general political orientation; S-C PO, socio-cultural political orientation.

- Generally, positive emotions were stronger among men and younger people (marginally).

In the area of protective policy regarding one's **own way of life**, the results (see Table 7) suggested that:

- Satisfaction and optimism were not predicted by any of the variables included in the model.
- Calmness and disappointment were marginally stronger among older people.
- Discouragement was stronger among older people (marginally), those on the political right both generally and socio-culturally (more liberal individuals).
- Anxiety was stronger among older and more educated people (marginally).
- Dissatisfaction was marginally stronger among people on the political right, as well as those older and more educated.
- Generally, negative emotions were marginally stronger among older and more educated people.
- Generally, positive emotions were marginally stronger among people from poorer households.

In the area of protection of **tradition and Polish culture**, results (see Table 8) suggested that:

- Pride was stronger among people on the political right (marginally), but also more liberal (socio-culturally).
- Satisfaction was marginally stronger among older people from larger cities and those on the liberal end of the political spectrum.
- Calmness was more prevalent among more liberal individuals.
- Optimism was stronger among older people and those from poorer households (marginally).
- Discouragement was not predicted by any variable included in the model.
- Anxiety was stronger among people who were older and lived in smaller cities and villages (marginally), as well as among the more conservative individuals.
- Disappointment was stronger among more conservative people.
- Dissatisfaction was stronger among older individuals and those who identified themselves as politically right-wing and conservative.
- Generally, negative emotions were stronger among older people and those who perceived themselves as conservative.
- Generally, positive emotions were marginally stronger among people from poorer households and those on the political right. Additionally, individuals who identified as more socio-culturally liberal reported experiencing more positive emotions.

**Table 6:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding security from crime and terrorism.

	GPO	S-C PO	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Calmness	0.08	-0.16***	0.03	0.09**	0.06*	-0.07*	-0.03	5.50***	0.03
Optimism	-0.04	-0.04	0.07*	0.07*	0.03	-0.01	-0.02	2.86**	0.02
Discouragement	-0.06	0.03	0.12***	0.04	0.02	-0.02	-0.03	3.42**	0.02
Fear	-0.04	0.08	0.03	-0.13***	-0.05	-0.04	-0.06	4.77***	0.03
Anxiety	0.02	0.05	0.16***	-0.09**	-0.05	0.04	-0.02	6.64***	0.04
Disappointment	-0.03	0.08	0.05	-0.02	-0.002	0.05	-0.06*	1.91	0.01
Dissatisfaction	0.01	0.05	0.11***	-0.02	-0.02	0.07*	-0.03	3.14**	0.02
Negative emotions in total	-0.01	0.11**	0.11***	-0.05	-0.03	0.04	-0.07*	5.08***	0.03
Positive emotions in total	0.001	-0.03	-0.07*	0.13***	0.03	-0.03	-0.05	4.18***	0.03

N = 1,124, \*\*\*p < 0.001 \*\*p < 0.01 \*p < 0.05. GPO, general political orientation; S-C PO, socio-cultural political orientation.

**Table 7:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding security to live one's own way of life.

	GPO	S-C PO	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Satisfaction	0.01	-0.02	0.03	0.06	0.04	-0.01	-0.03	1.10	0.01
Calmness	-0.03	-0.06	0.06*	0.06	0.02	-0.05	-0.03	3.15**	0.02
Optimism	-0.002	-0.002	0.03	0.05	-0.04	-0.01	0.02	0.88	0.01
Discouragement	0.12**	-0.11**	0.09**	0.02	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01	2.95**	0.02
Anxiety	0.01	0.05	0.13***	-0.04	-0.03	0.06*	-0.01	3.76***	0.02
Disappointment	0.04	0.04	0.07*	-0.02	0.02	0.06	-0.05	2.37*	0.02
Dissatisfaction	0.09*	0.03	0.07*	0.01	0.04	0.08**	-0.06	4.16***	0.03
Negative emotions in total	0.05	0.04	0.08*	0.01	0.003	0.08*	-0.08*	3.27**	0.02
Positive emotions in total	0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.06	-0.001	-0.03	-0.08**	1.89	0.01

*N* = 1,124; \*\*\**p* < 0.001 \*\**p* < 0.01 \**p* < 0.05. GPO, general political orientation; S-C PO, socio-cultural political orientation.

**Table 8:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding tradition and culture of Poland.

	GPO	S-C PO	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Pride	0.09*	-0.10*	0.01	-0.02	-0.004	-0.05	-0.01	1.22	0.01
Satisfaction	0.05	-0.10*	0.06*	0.02	0.09**	0.05	-0.04	3.87***	0.02
Calmness	0.01	-0.11**	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.003	-0.001	3.07**	0.02
Optimism	0.04	-0.12***	0.08*	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.07*	4.11***	0.03
Discouragement	-0.04	0.04	0.04	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	0.85	0.01
Anxiety	0.01	0.16***	0.11***	-0.06	-0.08**	0.06	-0.004	7.63***	0.05
Disappointment	0.06	0.12**	0.05	-0.02	-0.01	0.06	-0.05	5.65***	0.03
Dissatisfaction	0.08*	0.18***	0.14***	0.01	-0.03	0.02	-0.01	12.41***	0.07
Negative emotions in total	0.06	0.26***	0.12***	0.02	-0.05	0.03	-0.03	19.16***	0.11
Positive emotions in total	0.09*	-0.13**	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.02	-0.07*	2.52*	0.02

N = 1,124, \*\*\*p < 0.001 \*\*p < 0.01 \*p < 0.05. GPO, general political orientation; S-C PO, socio-cultural political orientation.

In the area of protection of **climate and environment**, results (see Table 9) suggested that:

- Discouragement and anxiety were stronger among older people and women (marginally).
- Dissatisfaction was stronger among older individuals.
- Sadness was stronger among older and more educated individuals (marginally).
- Disappointment was stronger among older respondents, and marginally stronger among educated individuals and men.
- Generally, negative emotions were stronger among older people.
- Generally, positive emotions were marginally stronger among those who identified themselves as on the political right.

### 3.1 Response Patterns of Participants

To check if we can identify general trends in responses of participants exceeding single areas of protective policies, in the next step, we explored distinct emotional response profiles within the sample. For the profile analysis, as in regressions, a 10 % threshold for emotion inclusion was adopted to ensure sufficient variance in the variables to provide meaningful results. However, to test the robustness of our results, we additionally tested a five-profile solution including all variables with a threshold of at least 5 % of indications. Results of this analysis are consistent with those presented in the paper (see Supplement).

We conducted a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) using the *tidyLPA* package in R. Models with one to seven classes were estimated and compared using a range of fit indices, including the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Consistent Akaike Information Criterion (CAIC), Classification Likelihood Criterion (CLC), and the Approximate Weight of Evidence (AWE). We tested 5-profile, 6-profile and 7-profile solutions.

Fit indices improved with increasing profile numbers, with BIC values steadily decreasing up to the 6-class solution (BIC = 368,671.820, see Table 11) and increasing slightly thereafter for the 7-class model (BIC = 368,725.535). Although the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method (Akogul and Erisoglu 2017) identified the 7-class model as optimal across multiple indices, it included two very small classes ( $n = 18$  and  $n = 26$ ; see Table 10), raising concerns about stability and interpretability. The 6-class model similarly included a very small class ( $n = 15$ ). In contrast, the 5-profile solution avoided such sparsity and yielded more balanced class sizes. It also had satisfying model fit indices (BIC = 368,878.47). Entropy for the 5-class model was 0.98, indicating high classification certainty. Although entropy values for the 6- and 7-class



**Table 9:** General and socio-cultural political orientations and socio-demographics as predictors of emotions in the area of protective policies regarding climate and environment.

	GPO	S-C PO	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Education	House-hold income	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Discouragement	-0.01	-0.04	0.11***	-0.08**	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	3.78***	0.02
Anxiety	-0.08	-0.05	0.16***	-0.07*	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	8.21***	0.05
Sadness	-0.05	-0.03	0.10***	0.02	-0.01	0.07*	-0.01	3.83***	0.02
Disappointment	-0.05	-0.07	0.11***	0.06*	-0.03	0.07*	-0.04	5.79***	0.04
Dissatisfaction	-0.001	-0.01	0.15***	-0.04	-0.002	0.02	-0.02	4.17***	0.03
Negative emotions in total	-0.06	-0.04	0.13***	-0.02	-0.02	0.04	-0.03	5.36***	0.03
General positive emotions in total	0.09*	-0.07	-0.02	0.06	0.02	-0.03	-0.10**	3.20**	0.02

N = 1,124, \*\*\*p < 0.001 \*\*p < 0.01 \*p < 0.05 GPO, general political orientation; S-C PO, socio-cultural political orientation.

solutions were slightly higher (0.99), the gain in certainty did not outweigh the drawbacks of sparsely populated classes.

3.1.1 Profile 1. Dissatisfied

People in this profile reported higher levels of negative emotions than in other profiles across all areas of protective policies. These emotions were mostly dissatisfaction and disappointment (all areas, although levels of these emotions were low in the area of protection of own way of life), followed by anxiety (except for protection of tradition and culture), fear, sadness, and anger (except for protection of own way of life and tradition and culture), discouragement, and grief (in the protective policy regarding economy and social welfare). They also reported no positive emotions, their marginal levels, or lower levels than in other profiles (e.g., calmness, optimism, satisfaction, hope, and pride, depending on the policy). The exception was joy, which appeared as a reaction to protective policies in social welfare, health, and climate. It is also worth noting that emotional reactions to policies protecting tradition and way of life were generally very low.

3.1.2 Profile 2. Content

People in this profile reported higher levels of positive emotions than in other profiles across all areas of protective policies. These emotions were mostly satisfaction, calmness, optimism, and hope (in all areas), followed by hope and pride (except in climate protection).

Interestingly, they also reported discouragement (except for protection of the economy), but other negative emotions were not reported or were marginal.

**Table 10:** Frequencies of respondents per profile in 5-profile, 6-profile, and 7-profile solutions.

	5 profile solution		6 profile solution		7 profile solution	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Profile 1	168	14.95	161	14.32	171	15.21
Profile 2	23	2.05	15	1.33	18	1.60
Profile 3	727	64.68	742	6.60	703	62.54
Profile 4	102	9.07	82	7.30	65	5.78
Profile 5	104	9.25	98	8.72	79	7.03
Profile 6			26	2.31	62	5.52
Profile 7					26	2.31

Table 11: Model fit indices for proposed solutions.

Solution	AIC	AWE	BIC	CAIC	Entropy
5 profiles	365,873.73	374,871.25	368,878.47	369,476.47	0.98
6 profiles	365,164.61	375,667.05	368,671.82	369,369.82	0.99
7 profiles	364,715.87	376,723.23	368,725.54	369,523.54	0.99

Subsequent analyses focus on the 5-profile solution, characterizing each latent class in terms of emotional response patterns and exploring demographic predictors of class membership.

3.1.3 Profile 3. Indifferent

People in this profile reported no emotions or lower levels of any emotions than in other profiles across all areas of protective policies.

3.1.4 Profile 4. Economically Satisfied

People in this profile reported higher satisfaction in the area of protective policy regarding the economy than in other profiles. They also reported low levels of calmness, hope, and optimism in this area. All other emotions were low or not reported.

3.1.5 Profile 5. Calm

People in this profile reported higher levels of calmness and optimism (although not very high) in all areas of protective policies than people from other profiles, except for Profile 2, and higher pride regarding the protection of the country’s tradition and culture (again, except for Profile 2).

In the next step, we explored whether people in these profiles differed in their demographic characteristics. For the analyses, five dichotomous variables were created, each indicating whether a respondent belonged to (1) or did not belong to (0) a given profile. Each variable corresponded to a different profile. For each of these variables, a logistics regression was conducted to inspect which demographic variables predict each of the response patterns. Socio-cultural political orientation was dropped from the models by SPSS due to high collinearity between the two political orientations. Results of these analyses are summarized in Table 12.

Higher education predicted belonging to profile 1 (dissatisfied). Additionally, the impact of age (with older individuals being more likely to be dissatisfied) approached statistical significance ( $OR = 1.01, p = 0.058$ ). Belonging to profile 2 (content) was only predicted by gender ( $OR = 2.69, p = 0.032$ ), with men having greater odds of belonging to this profile. Profile 3 (indifferent) was more common among women ( $OR = 0.68$ ,

**Table 12:** Demographic predictors of profiles of emotional responses to protective policy areas.

	Profile 1. dissatisfied		Profile 2. content		Profile 3. indifferent		Profile 4. economi- cally satisfied		Profile 5. calm	
	OR (SE)	p	OR (SE)	p	OR (SE)	p	OR (SE)	p	OR (SE)	p
Gender	1.08 (0.17)	0.645	2.69 (0.46)	0.032	0.68 (0.13)	0.002	1.46 (0.21)	0.075	1.40 (0.21)	0.107
Age	1.01 (0.01)	0.058	1.00 (0.01)	0.843	0.99 (0.004)	0.025	1.01 (0.01)	0.118	1.00 (0.01)	0.975
Education	1.13 (0.06)	0.030	0.90 (0.138)	0.435	1.02 (0.04)	0.665	0.93 (0.07)	0.278	0.88 (0.07)	0.060
Subjective income	0.95 (0.05)	0.262	0.92 (0.13)	0.497	1.12 (0.04)	0.002	0.95 (0.06)	0.357	0.85 (0.06)	0.012
General political orientation	1.04 (0.07)	0.541	0.92 (0.16)	0.603	1.01 (0.05)	0.885	0.90 (0.08)	0.189	1.05 (0.08)	0.579
N	1,124		1,124		1,124		1,124		1,124	
–2 log likelihood	937.92		217.75		1,432.70		672.58		676.98	
Chi2	10.25	0.115	6.68	0.352	27.16	< 0.001	11.40	0.077	16.18	0.013
Pseudo-R2	0.02		0.01		0.02		0.01		0.01	

$p = 0.002$ ), younger individuals ( $OR = 0.99$ ,  $p = 0.025$ ), and those with higher subjective household income ( $OR = 1.12$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). Belonging to profile 4 (economically satisfied) was not related to any demographic characteristics. Profile 5 (calm) was related to lower subjective income ( $OR = 0.85$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ).

## 4 Discussion

The protection of citizens is one of the primary roles of every state. States implement different protective policies to fulfill this task. The present study aimed to explore the emotions potentially evoked by seven protective policies in the areas of the economy, social welfare, health, personal security from crime and terrorism, one's own way of life, the country's tradition and culture, as well as climate and environment. To achieve this, a representative sample of adult Polish citizens was asked to choose the emotions experienced in relation to these seven policies and indicate to what extent they felt them. Based on these answers, patterns of emotional reactions were found. Also, the role of the political orientation of participants and their socio-demographic characteristics in these emotional reactions was explored.

Results indicate that emotions evoked by protective policies vary across areas of protection. Only four emotions (discouragement, anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction) were indicated by more than 10 % of adult Poles in all areas of protection. This may suggest a more general negative attitude toward the quality of Polish protective policies, or perhaps toward Polish politicians. Interestingly, the most systematic predictor of all policies was the age of respondents. Older age predicted negative emotions in all areas except the economy, where younger people reported more negative emotions. The most common emotions for older participants through policies were dissatisfaction (predicted by older age in all areas), anxiety (except for economy), and disappointment (in four out of seven studied areas). As Webb (2013) demonstrates, individuals who believe in democracy and are dissatisfied tend to be more engaged in politics. These results may explain why older Poles are more likely to participate in elections than younger ones (Kolenda-Zaleska 2023).

Although there were general trends in emotional reactions to all policies, there were also area-specific emotions and their predictors. These include policy-specific emotions such as grief in the area of economy, despair in the area of healthcare, and pride in the area of protection of traditions and culture in Poland.

The largest number of different emotions that were indicated by at least 10 % of participants appeared in the area of the economy. The most common were negative emotions of anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. A bit less frequent were discouragement, fear, and anger. These emotions may be related to an overall economic situation in Poland and around the world, but also to the state of individual

finances. Poland was hit by a large inflation, has high interest rates for loans, and rising energy prices due to the war in Ukraine (among other reasons). However, positive emotions were also experienced in this area; these indicated by at least 10 % of participants, included: hope, optimism, calmness, and satisfaction. They may be related to actions of the relatively new government, which aims at introducing multiple changes in the Polish economy and thus may provide better stability and protection in this area. Regression analyses provided some insight into differences in experienced emotions. Women were more anxious than men about the protection of the economy, which can perhaps be explained by subjective income inequalities between genders (Cianciara et al. 2016). The fact that younger people felt more fear and less hope than older people may be explained by similar reasons: many of them are just entering the job market and have not acquired resources, such as their own housing. This lack of economic security may lie at the source of their fear. Interestingly, more educated people felt more anxious, disappointed, and discouraged. Perhaps their awareness of the policy weaknesses is greater due to their education. But this may also be explained by the fact that although education improves the financial situation of a household, this so-called “education bonus” has been rapidly declining in Poland over recent years (Wędrowska and Muszyńska 2022). This may be disappointing and discouraging.

Protection in the area of social welfare evoked anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction in around a quarter of adult Poles. Other experienced negative emotions were discouragement, fear, and sadness. They may be due to a large load for taxpayers regarding all the benefits provided by the State. However, joy and calmness were also indicated by at least 10 % of respondents. Generally, positive feelings were related to a worse economic situation of a household, which is understandable, since these are the ones that are more dependent on state-issued aid, such as 800+ programs (800 PLN for each child) or financial assistance for unemployed people. General negative emotions, on the other hand, did not have any statistically significant predictors among the ones we tested.

Protection in the area of health also seems to evoke predominantly negative emotions, with anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction being experienced by over a quarter of adult Poles. They are more prevalent among older people, which may be a result of their more frequent interactions with the healthcare system due to age-related health concerns. This may expose them more directly to systemic inefficiencies, extremely long waiting times, resource shortages, and administrative challenges. This firsthand experience may contribute to heightened negative emotions, as they perceive the strain on the healthcare system more acutely than younger individuals who engage with it less frequently. Interestingly, protection of health was the only area that evoked despair (indicated by a fifth of the respondents). It was related to being on the political right and being a woman. The relationship with

gender is easily understood in the context of inadequate care regarding reproductive health and one of the harshest abortion laws in Europe (Hussein et al. 2018, Rak and Skrzypek 2024).

Anxiety was an emotion most frequently evoked by the area of security from crime and terrorism (felt by a quarter of adult Poles). Other reported emotions were also predominantly negative, including fear, discouragement, dissatisfaction, and disappointment. Again, older people felt more negative emotions, especially anxiety and discouragement. Also, women felt more anxiety and fear, while men experienced more calmness. It stands in line with Gruszczyńska's (2007) paper, where she argues that the stronger negative emotions among women in the context of safety may stem from the risk of being sexually assaulted. On the other hand, men reported more positive emotions, including calmness. Political orientation also turned out to predict emotions in this area of security: liberals reported more calmness than conservative respondents. These relationships align with earlier studies that suggest a connection between conservatism and a right-leaning political orientation, and their association with perceived threats (Jost et al. 2017).

Protection of the right to live one's own way of life evoked both positive emotions – such as calmness, satisfaction, and optimism – and negative ones, including discouragement, anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. It suggests the existence of two distinct societal groups with opposing views on civil liberties in personal matters (Scovil 2024). However, most relationships between emotions and socio-demographic factors were either statistically non-significant or marginal. The only demographic variable with a substantial impact on emotions was age: older individuals reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than younger ones. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that older adults are more likely to perceive societal changes as threatening, particularly when such changes challenge long-standing traditions and social norms they have internalized over decades (Cornelis et al. 2009). Discouragement, on the other hand, was observed among both individuals identifying as liberal and those on the political right, although likely for different reasons. While conservative voters tend to express strong opposition to liberal reforms and actively voice their discontent, those on the progressive end of the spectrum often feel frustrated by what they perceive as the slow pace of change. This dual sense of discouragement reflects the broader ideological divide within Polish society, where competing visions of social progress continue to generate both hope and disillusionment.

The state's protection of traditions and Polish culture evoked both positive and negative emotions in equal measure. On the one hand, participants reported feelings of pride, satisfaction, calmness, and optimism; on the other, discouragement, anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. Pride is particularly interesting, as protection of traditional culture is the only area where the percentage of its indications

exceeded 10 %. This emotion is also related to both being on the political right and being liberal. It may suggest that Poles on both sides of the political spectrum are proud of their culture and heritage and value its preservation and protection (see e.g., Szczepańska and Klusek 2022). Also, other emotions tend to be impacted by the socio-cultural political orientation, with liberals expressing overall more positive emotions, including satisfaction, calmness, and optimism, while conservatives tend to express more negative emotions, such as anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. Perhaps the latter respondents feel that tradition and culture could be celebrated even more. Again, older people tend to express more negative emotions (especially anxiety and dissatisfaction) with the level of protection of culture. It may be related to their perception of liberal changes in society, which can be perceived as a threat to the culture as they know it, leading to insecurity and, consequently, to anxiety (Cornelis et al. 2009).

Climate is the only area where at least 10 % respondents indicated negative emotions, and no positive emotions reached this threshold. Since everyone is unhappy with these policies, perhaps a state's strategy of standing in the middle makes all parties dissatisfied. However, interestingly, older age is a clear predictor of all the negative emotions related to the protection of climate and environment. Other research confirms that, unlike in other countries, young people in Poland are less concerned about the climate crisis than older people (Strzałkowski 2023). Therefore, perhaps the negative emotions felt by older people are a sign of recognizing the importance of this policy.

Results showed that reported frequencies of evoked emotions differ between areas. The most emotions were reported in the area of economy, which may suggest that protection in this area is the most important to adult Poles. Also, since the emotions are predominantly negative, it can be inferred that people may want to see a change in this area of protective policies. Interestingly, there is little polarization here, since positive emotions are less frequently reported. Similar patterns can be found in areas of social welfare and health.

Perhaps counterintuitively, the most polarizing areas are those with the least frequency and strength of emotions: the protection of tradition and culture of Poland, and the protection of freedom to live one's own way of life. A lower amount of emotions may suggest that these areas are not seen as crucial for citizens, and thus, gather less focus and fewer reactions. On the other hand, the split between positive and negative emotions in both areas suggests polarization in society in this regard. It seems that one group of citizens wishes to push for changes (such as, e.g., introducing same-sex marriages) and the other wants more traditional socio-cultural solutions. This division is strengthened by Polish politicians, especially those representing right-wing parties, including PiS, which governed Poland until recently.



We also identified general trends in the responses of participants exceeding single areas of protective policies, revealing five distinct emotional response profiles within the sample: dissatisfied, content, indifferent, economically satisfied, and calm. The respondents belonging to the dissatisfied profile reported relatively strong negative emotions in all the studied areas and were more educated than those from other profiles. Respondents belonging to the content profile, predominantly male, felt relatively many positive and few negative emotions in all areas. The respondents belonging to the indifferent profile, predominantly female, younger, and with higher subjective income, can be characterized by a lack of emotional responses to protective policies. The respondents belonging to the economically satisfied profile reported only strong satisfaction in the area of economy, while not reporting or reporting only weak levels of other emotions. The respondents belonging to the calm profile reported high levels of calm and optimism. Surprisingly, these were people with lower subjective household income. To understand this phenomenon, further research would be needed.

The observed association between higher educational attainment and negative affect may reflect the legacy of policy measures implemented under prior populist administrations, whose initiatives tended to receive comparatively lower support among highly educated segments of the Polish population. Additionally, higher education may be associated with a greater interest in policies and possibly a higher awareness of their limitations and weaknesses. On the other hand, the fact that mostly women and young respondents belong to the indifferent profile may be related to their traditionally lower interest in politics and lower electoral participation (Bos et al. 2022; Herre 2024; Pensiero and Janmaat 2024).

We hypothesized that emotional responses to protective policies would depend on political orientations and demographic characteristics of respondents. The results confirmed the role of demographic characteristics, which we discussed in detail before. Contrary to expectations, we found weak relationships between political orientations and emotional reactions to protective policies (see also Tables S1 and S2 in the supplement); the role of demographic characteristics seems more significant. Although this may be surprising, it is worth remembering that policies are designed and implemented over many years by many governments from all political spectrums. It means that emotional reactions may not be led by political preferences, but by a generalized discontent over policies and situations in a given area. Another possible explanation is that the study was conducted within a year from elections, when the victorious coalition became the ruling party after eight years of being in the opposition. It is possible that the current results capture a transitional period, where some people still think about the consequences of policies introduced by previous governments, while others look to the future and possible changes. However, even more probable is the explanation regarding the predictive role of

demographics – certain demographic groups tend to vote for specific parties and identify with their placement on the political spectrum. This way, the impact of political orientation on emotional reactions to protective policies disappears, overruled by demographic characteristics of citizens.

## 5 Limitations

The current study was conducted in Poland, within the context of Polish culture and existing protective policies. To make any generalizations, similar research should be conducted in other countries.

## 6 Conclusions

Results of the study conducted on a representative sample of Polish citizens demonstrated that emotions evoked by protective policies vary across areas of protection. Only four emotions (discouragement, anxiety, disappointment, and dissatisfaction) were indicated by more than 10 % of adult Poles in all areas of protection. We also observed area-specific emotions and their predictors, such as grief in the economic policy, despair in the healthcare policy, or pride in the preservation of traditions and culture policy.

Our findings indicate that emotional responses to state protective policies in Poland are more strongly connected to demographic characteristics than to political orientation. This suggests that citizens' everyday experiences, linked to their age, gender, education, and economic security, may matter more for their evaluations of public policies than ideological leanings. Beyond these general patterns, the identification of five relatively balanced emotional profiles – dissatisfied, content, indifferent, economically satisfied, and calm – shows that citizens do not form a single emotional community but instead cluster into groups with distinct ways of responding to protective policies.

The predominance of the dissatisfied profile underscores the breadth of negative sentiment, while the presence of content and calm profiles points to stable pockets of trust and optimism. The indifferent and economically satisfied groups, in turn, remind us that disengagement and selective concern are also part of the emotional landscape. Taken together, these findings suggest that among Poles, both emotional engagement (whether positive or negative) and disengagement from politics can be observed.

## 7 Disclaimer

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