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Sentiment & Emotions on Lebanese Politics



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Our research¹ sets out to find how sentiments and [emotions are used in conflict](#). We look at Hezbollah as a resistance actor and Aoun, the president of Lebanon, as the establishment actor. A resistance actor is a political actor that isn't in control of a sovereign state. Conversely, an establishment actor is the legitimate power holder of the said state. For this study, we look at Hezbollah, a particular resistance actor, and Shia militant group. Hezbollah is very involved in the country's politics despite being recognized as a terrorist group by many Western powers. [The political actor has 13 seats in the 128-seat Lebanese parliament. It is also considered to be a strong military power with more than 40,000 militia fighters in total.](#)

First and foremost, it's necessary to understand what sentiment and emotions, or discrete emotions, are. A good theory to look at has been developed by Plutchik. They organize a [system where 8 emotions](#) contribute to either a positive or negative sentiment. Positive sentiment encapsulates 4 emotions: joy, trust, anticipation, and surprise. Negative sentiment covers the 4 other emotions including fear, anger, sadness, and disgust.

Since emotions impact behaviour, or the way that we think and process things, it is expected that an appraisal of positive emotions will be connected to positive action, and vice-versa. Think, for example, about fear. When you feel afraid, you want to flee the situation at hand. When you think of trust, on the other hand, you think of something familiar, and this can even bring you closer to the speaker. This is exactly what happens in political contexts. Political actors will use emotions to influence their followers. This ignites a certain reaction and manifests a political agenda.

¹ A more extensive and detailed explanation of the research can be found at the following [link](#).



In the context of the middle east, Hezbollah has been a longstanding resistance actor that has played an important role in shaping the region. You may have heard of Hezbollah in the news recently. Maybe you have heard of the [Lebanese protests](#) against ex-prime minister Saad Hariri and the Lebanese financial crisis. Or maybe you've heard of the [Soleimani assassination](#) and subsequent Beirut bombing in August 2020. You may even recall the continuous [clashes between Israel and Hezbollah](#), an explicitly anti-Zionist actor. All of these major events were referred to in specific public speeches on behalf of both the resistance and the establishment actors.

We collected speeches, both in Arabic and English, in order to create datasets we could work with. Using programming languages such as R, we were able to automate this process: a little robot collecting speeches for us and organizing them accordingly. Then, we used the equivalent of a [dictionary](#) to associate words with specific emotions and sentiments. This is the beginning of our sentiment analysis that helped us measure the frequency of positive and negative sentiment words followed by the frequency of discrete emotions words. Think of our “dictionary” here as a vending machine that separates coins automatically into different piles. This is the same principle for the dictionary that is able to categorize words into either positive or negative sentiment (or neutral!) and then into different discrete emotions. We focused specifically on the dichotomous emotions of fear and trust. We ran our sentiment analysis on both Aoun's speeches and Hezbollah's speeches and we compared the results. Furthermore, we evaluated the presence of said sentiments and emotions after pivotal political events, such as the ones we talked about earlier.

The results were both surprising and relevant in the field of conflict politics. The results of our study show that the resistant actor Hezbollah shows more negative sentiment in comparison to the establishment actor. However, the positive sentiment has higher frequencies than expected based on previous studies. In fact, the establishment actor uses positive sentiment a lot throughout pivotal events as a communication tool and strategy. Related to specific events such as the Israel-related events there is no relevant difference in the sentiment communicated by Hezbollah and Aoun. Nevertheless, Hezbollah presents high frequencies of fear when speaking specifically about Israel. This is also a key finding as it reveals that, apart from specific cases, both the resistance actor and the establishment actor counterbalance fear with trust in their speeches. While they present danger through fear, they will invoke familiar thoughts and ideas through trust.

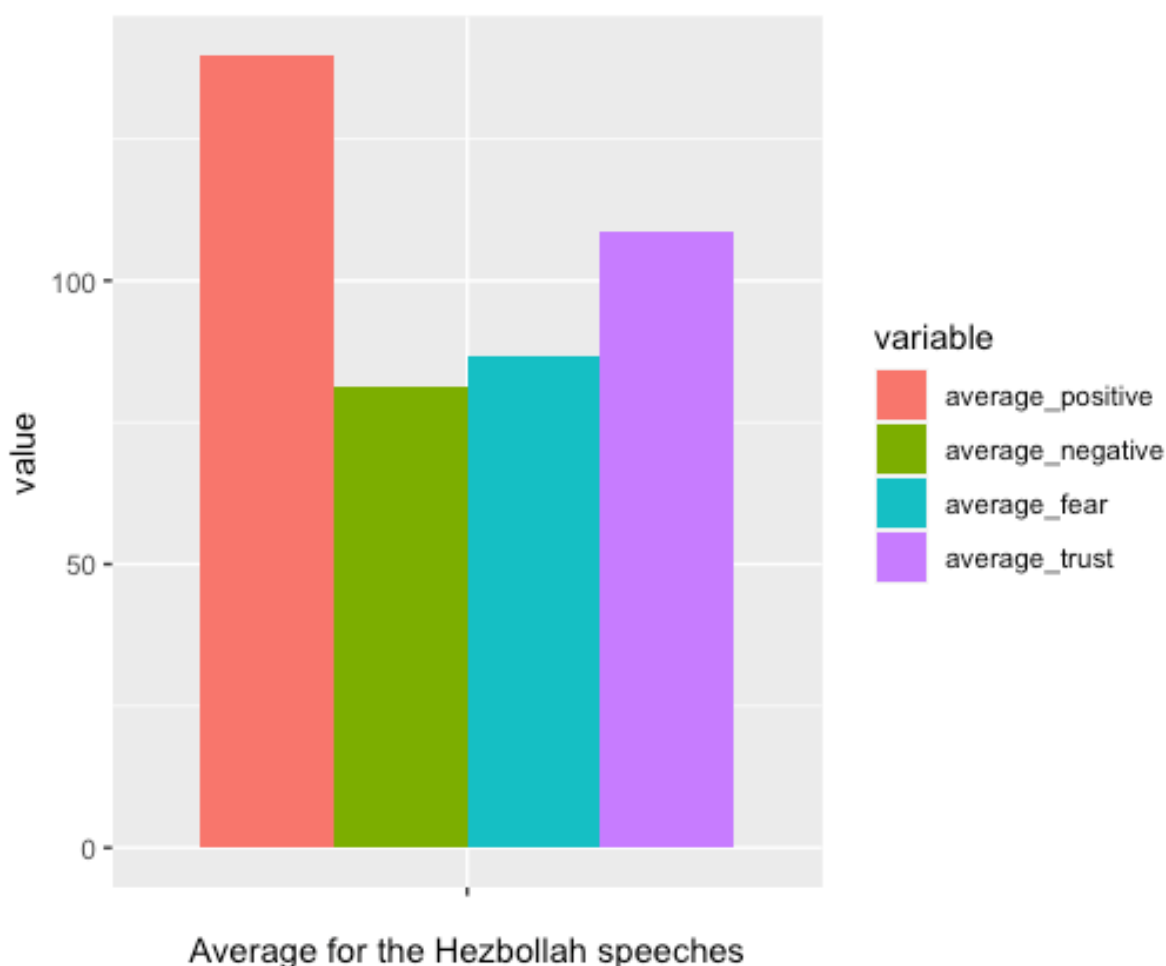


Figure 1. Average for Hezbollah speeches

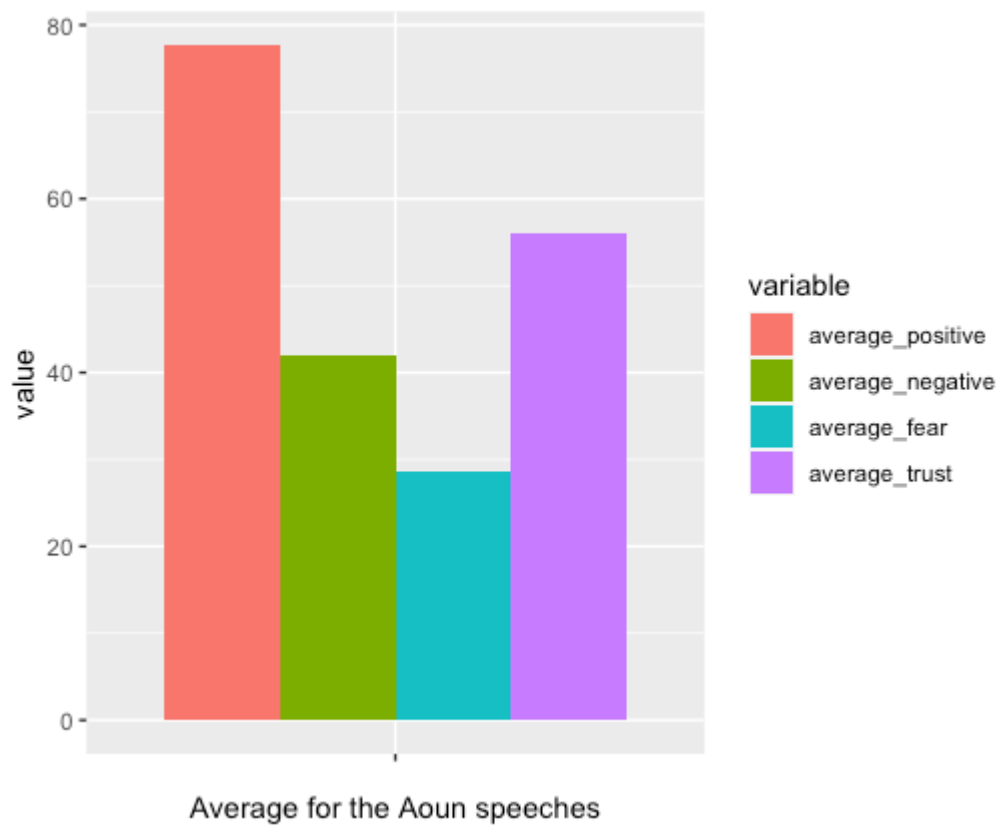


Figure 2. Average for the Aoun Speeches

**Keep in mind that the amount of documents that we obtained for the establishment actor is quite smaller than for the resistance actor due to the online availability of the content. The results are averages of the entire group of documents, not the event per se.*

Some of the results above were expected for our study, yet some of the results we found went against expectations. Such expectations were based on previous literature and studies on the subject matter. The baseline that emerges from the literature is that generally a [resistance actor will show a prevalence of negative sentiment and fear in comparison to the establishment actor which would show high frequencies of positive sentiment and trust](#). The reason why our results are very interesting is because those that match our expectations see Hezbollah fulfilling the role of resistance actor. For example, the resistance actor will use more fear when faced with a strong sovereign establishment actor, such as Israel, to deter their own members from putting themselves at risk. However, in other situation, for example when Hezbollah gives speeches after pivotal events, we can see this party shifting their political strategy as a resistance actor that has an important role in domestic politics. In addition, though some of our expectations are validated, Hezbollah still surprised us when looking at the frequencies of positive sentiment for example. In

comparison to the establishment actor, Hezbollah uses many of the same communication strategies such as counterbalancing fear with trust, a positive emotion.

This research is fascinating and brings new perspectives onto the table. Sentiment analysis is still a relatively new method in political science, especially in the conflict area. This means that not only has this type of study never been fully executed, but this also means that conducting more studies in Arabic, amongst other languages, will allow us to broaden our understanding of the relationship between emotions sentiment and conflict.