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Examining Political Defection: An Analysis of Affective Intelligence, Media Attention, Political Knowledge and Issue Agreement

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Examining Political Defection: An Analysis of Affective Intelligence, Media Attention, Political Knowledge and Issue Agreement

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Introduction

•**General Overview of the Present Study and Political Defection**
•Political Defection- When an individual votes for a candidate outside his or her own political party (Beck, 2002).
•This study serves as an analysis of the different factors that are associated with political defection.
•The factors included in this study are political information, affective intelligence, and issue distance.

•**Political Information**
•Political Information can be separated into two categories; political understanding and media attention .
•Although for different reasons, voters with very low political understanding and very high political understanding are unlikely to defect due to heavy reliance on partisanship (Forgette & Platt, 1999).
•The majority of defectors are most likely to have a moderate amount of political understanding (Forgette & Platt, 1999).
•Media attention is associated with defection rates because media can alter the image of the candidates to the voters (Johnson, Mahoud & Sothirajah, 2000).
•Individuals with greater amounts of political knowledge also pay greater amounts of attention to the media (Atkin & Heald, 2001).
•The interaction of political understanding and media attention on defection rates has yet to be explored in great detail.

•**Issue Distance**
•Most voters have at least one political issue they consider very important.
•In turn, if a voter does not agree with their candidates issue position, they are more likely to defect (Kim, 2009).

•**Affective Intelligence**
•Affective intelligence theory- An individual's emotions and attitudes construct the political identity of that that individual (Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen, 2000).
•Three emotions are typically associated with voting behavior: are anxiety, anger, and enthusiasm.
•Of these three, anxiety is the most accurate emotional predictor of defection (Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen, 2000).

Abstract

In politics the political party affiliation of the voter often serves as a predictor for the voting behavior of that individual. However, a voter may occasionally vote against his or her political party, an action known as defection. The present study serves two purposes. The first is to compare defectors and non-defectors across a variety of relevant characteristics, including emotion experienced for one's in-party candidate, attention to media, political understanding, and issue agreement between oneself and one's in-party candidate. The second is to examine the correlations between the individual elements of these theories with one another. Results of this study indicate emotion and issue agreement to be significantly different between defectors and non-defectors, while political understanding and media attention are not. Further correlations were found between emotion and the other topics mentioned, suggesting a relationship between emotions and voting behavior.

Pearson Correlation Matrix among Variables Associated with Defection

	Attention	Understanding	Welfare Issue distance	Defense issue distance	Health care issue distance	Enthusiasm toward own candidate	Anger toward own candidate	Anxiety toward own candidate
Defection	-.050	-.031	.360***	.375***	.079**	-.629***	.315***	.387***
Attention		.333***	.036	.040	.045	.272***	.110***	.091***
Understanding			.024	.017	.021	.184***	.071**	.043
Welfare Issue Distance				.284***	.141***	-.333***	.274***	.265***
Defense issue distance					.072**	-.287***	.223***	.230***
Health care issue distance						-.089***	.107***	.097***
Enthusiasm toward own candidate							-.211***	-.254***
Anger toward own candidate								.461***

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

Procedure

•**ANES 2008 Time Series**
•Data was obtained from American National Election Studies (ANES) 2008 Time Series Study.
• This study contains a nationally available data set available for to anyone doing research in political psychology.
•The data set is available at www.electionstudies.org

•**Defector measures**
•Participants were asked to report whether or not they viewed themselves as liberal or conservative.
•For self-identified liberals, the own-party candidate was Barack Obama.
•For self-identified conservatives, the own-party candidate was John McCain.
•Defection occurred when a self-identified liberal voted for McCain and when a self-identified conservative voted for Obama.

•**Political Understanding and Media Attention Measures**
•Participants were asked to identify their level of political knowledge and understanding on a 1-5 scales.
•Participants were also asked to similarly rank the amount of attention they paid to political information.

•**Issue Distance Measures**
•Participants ' were given issue positions on welfare, defense, and universal health care.
•They were then asked to score their agreement on a scale from 1-7; 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree..
•Participants also gave their own-party candidate's score.
•Issue distance was the subtracted difference of the two scores.

•**Affective Intelligence Measures**
•Participants were asked if they ever felt afraid, hopeful, proud, and/or angry towards John McCain and Barack Obama.
•Participants who answered yes were then asked how much.
•These scores were given corresponding numerical values.
•Hope and Pride were combined in order to form the enthusiasm variable.

Hypothesis

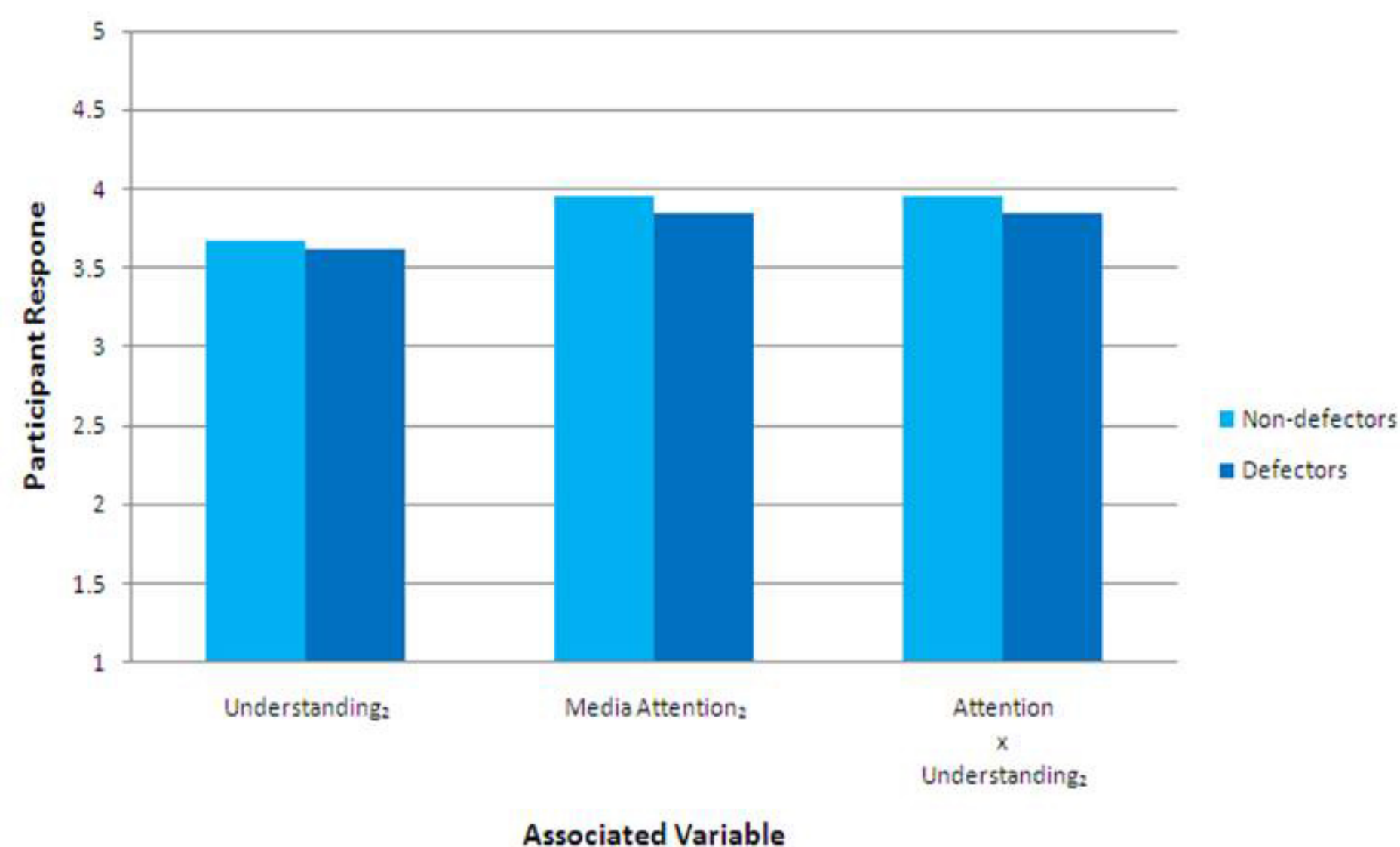
•**Political Understanding and Media Attention**
•Defectors and non-defectors will not show significantly different levels of political understanding.
•Defectors will have higher attention than non-defectors.
•Defectors will show especially higher levels of media attention. than non-defectors for voters with moderate political understanding.

•**Issue distance**
•Defectors will show greater amounts of issue distance than non-defectors for all issues..

•**Affective Intelligence**
•Defectors will show higher levels of anxiety than non-defectors.
•Defectors will not show significantly different levels of anger and enthusiasm than non-defectors.

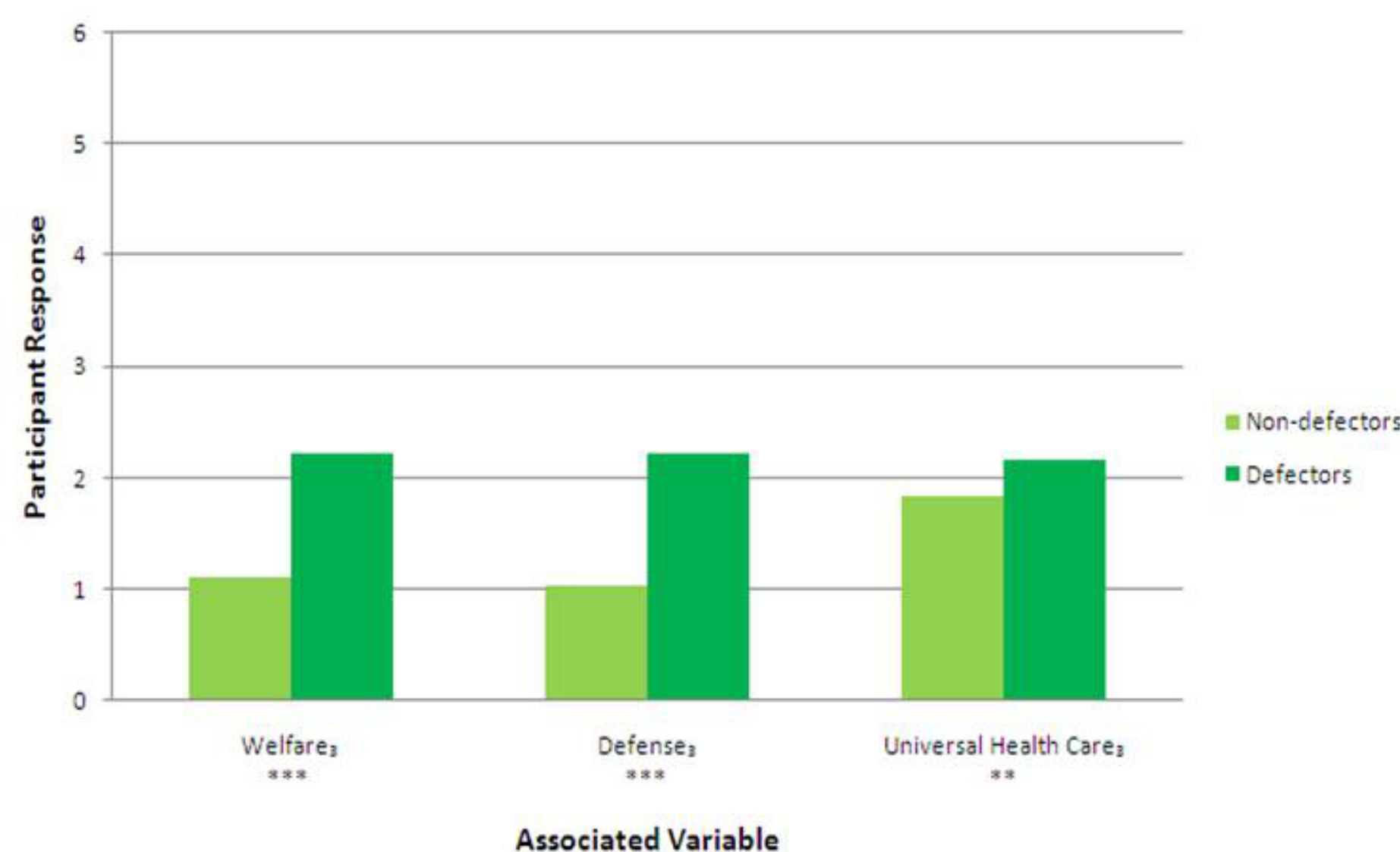
•**Variable Correlations**
•No prediction will be made; the results are exploratory

Political Understanding and Media Attention



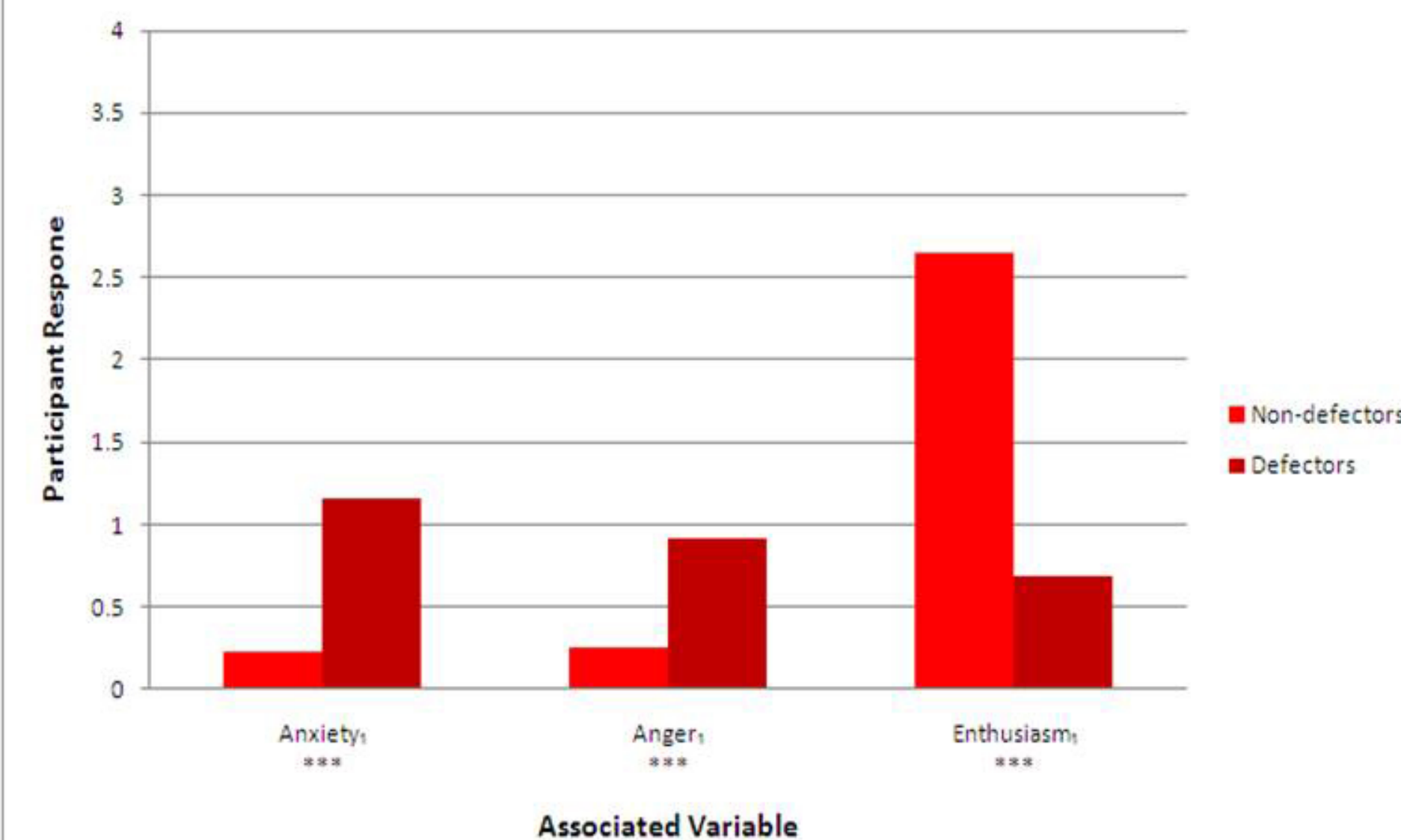
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
z: response scores range from 1-5

Issue Distance



* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
z: response scores range from 0-6

Affective Intelligence



* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
z: response scores range from 0-4

Results

•**Political Understanding and Media Attention**
•Defectors and non-defectors did not significantly differ in either political understanding nor media attention .
•Defectors and non-defectors with different levels of political understanding did also not significantly differ in terms of levels of media attention..

•**Issue Distance**
•For all three issues, defectors showed greater amounts issue distance than non-defectors.

•**Affective Intelligence**
•Defectors showed greater amounts of enthusiasm than non-defectors.
•Defectors showed greater amounts of anger than non defectors.
•Defectors showed lower amounts of enthusiasm than non-defectors.

•**Variable Correlations**
•See the above table for results of the variable correlations.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate mixed success of the hypotheses. As predicted, defectors and non-defectors did not show significantly different levels of political understanding. Defectors often have very low or very high amounts of political understanding. When these scores are composited, they are not significantly different from non-defectors, who are predicted to possess moderate levels of political understanding (Forgette & Platt, 1999). Defectors and non-defectors did not show significantly different levels of media attention as predicted. It is possible that this is because the degree of media attention was obtained via self-report. Other studies that found an association between defection and media attention used a more experimental design; exposing the participant to different political ads and measuring the effect (Choi & Lee, 2007). This flaw in design could also have influenced the lack of significance between defection and political understanding predicting media attention. The hypotheses also show mixed results by accurately predicting the differences of issue distance for defectors and non-defectors, but conflicting with previous research over affective intelligence. A potential explanation may be the emphasis Barack Obama's campaigning platform placed on the feelings of hope and anger in the 2008 presidential election. The campaigning platform's emphasis on these emotions may have increased their significance in the data set. Further research will be needed to examine this theory. Additionally, the above correlations provide evidence that the various theories of defection may be able to explain each other. For example, issue distance motivate feelings of anxiety, which in turn could motivate defection. Or perhaps feelings of anxiety motivate a voter to change their position on a issue, increasing issue distance. Although no causal relationships can be determined from this study, the results do suggest that political defection is a complex process of thoughts, emotions, and the interaction of those processes.