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Understanding anti-government sentiment and the public's anti-corruption behavior: The roles of perceived ethics failure, emotional leadership, and communication strategy

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Understanding the effects of perceived ethics failure, compassionate leadership, and communication strategy on anti-government sentiment

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Abstract

This study conceptualizes anti-government sentiment and tests the relationships between anti-government sentiment and three antecedents (i.e., ethics failure, compassionate leadership, and communication strategy). An online survey ($n = 1,112$) was conducted in South Korea. Exploratory factor analysis with principal component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the measures proposed for anti-government sentiment. The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. Results show that publics' perceptions of the government's ethics failure, lack of compassionate leadership, and use of a buffering strategy for communication are positively related to their anti-government sentiment toward the incumbent government.

1 INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 2014, the Korean ferry MV *Sewol*—carrying 476 people and a large volume of cargo—capsized en route between Inchon and Jeju Island. Only 172 people survived ("South Korea Coast Guard Captain Jailed," 2015). The 304 fatalities included 250 high school students ("First Anniversary of Sewol Ferry Disaster," 2015). Eighty-two percent of 1,008 survey participants in Korea reported that the government's actions in handling the disaster were improper (Gallup Korea, 2014). The disaster caused conflict between victims' families and the Korean Government, resulting in fraught emotions in society and confrontations between anti-government activists and the government (Song, Park, & Park, 2015). According to weekly surveys conducted by Gallup Korea in 2014 and 2015, Korean people were frustrated with the Korean Government due to its lack of transparency in communication, dismal performance, and lack of responsible leadership (Gallup Korea,2014).

The ferry disaster is an example of an incident that triggered public antagonism against the Korean Government. Because public antagonism against the government could be detrimental to public administration, it is crucial for governments to understand how and why anti-government sentiment such as this emerges. Anti-government sentiment is a complex phenomenon caused by multiple social and cultural causes (Mansbridge, 1997). It can be multifaceted in form and meaning in different countries. However, there is a lack of consensus on how to define and measure anti-government sentiment (Owen & Dennis, 2001).

To respond to the lack of research on this phenomenon, this study takes the following steps. First, we conceptualize anti-government sentiment as publics' hostile emotions toward their incumbent government's behaviors that publics find problematic. Second, we propose five measurement items based on exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with principal component analysis (PCA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Third, on the basis of Owen and Dennis' (2001) study on political support, we identify three antecedents to anti-government sentiment: ethics failure, compassionate leadership, and buffering strategy (specifically government communication). Finally, by examining the relationships among anti-government sentiment and its antecedents via structural equation modeling (SEM), this study seeks to propose a theoretical framework of anti-government sentiment.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualization of anti-government sentiment

Public relations research has found associations between the quality of the organization–public relationship (OPR) and publics' supportive and/or hostile behaviors toward an organization (e.g., J.-N. Kim & Rhee, 2011; Y. Kim, 2015). Although negative relational features of OPR, such as dissatisfaction, distrust, control dominance, and dissolution (Moon & Rhee, 2013), could also be used as indicators for negative government–public relationship, they are different from publics' temporary, negative emotional reactions to the government's behaviors that they find problematic. These emotions reflect publics' situational affective state regarding those problems.

In response to the lack of research on publics' negative emotional reactions to their government's behaviors (i.e., anti-government sentiment), this study aims to conceptualize anti-government sentiment and identify its antecedents. In conceptualizing anti-government sentiment, several points should be considered. First, publics' hostile emotions toward the government could be either situational or cumulative. 1 Cumulative anti-government sentiment can be developed through publics' experiences *over time* and often encompasses several regimes. Previous literature has used political distrust or cynicism as cumulative anti-government sentiment (e.g., Miller, 1974), 2 which refers to publics' long-held beliefs or perceptions that the government is incapable of resolving societal problems (Moy & Scheufele, 2000). This study focuses on situational anti-government sentiment as publics' momentary, hostile sentiment against their current government's problems. Although there are abundant studies on political distrust or cynicism as cumulative anti-government sentiment, there is little research that investigates and measures situational anti-government sentiment toward the incumbent regime.

Second, different terms have been used to characterize anti-government sentiment, including political skepticism, cynicism, distrust, and dissatisfaction (e.g., Cebula & Paul, 2002; Pinkleton, Austin, Zhou, Willoughby, & Reiser, 2012). However, the lack of proper measurement of anti-government sentiment has led to the "problem of conflating the causes, symptoms, or consequences with the definitions of the phenomenon" (Owen & Dennis, 2001, p. 209). Some interrelated terms refer to the *causes* of anti-government sentiment rather than characteristics of the phenomenon. For example, political distrust or cynicism could be a cause of anti-government sentiment (Orren, 1997) and could lead publics to demand reforms for government's practices or behaviors (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2010, 2012).

Third, anti-government sentiment should be carefully construed and distinguished from similar terms because terms such as "political cynicism" or "skepticism" are not necessarily negative. Healthy skepticism could help the government improve its democratic governance (Nye, 1997). Deteriorating trends in publics' political trust (e.g., Miller, 1974), publics' political support (Owen & Dennis, 2001), and publics' confidence in government (Nye, 1997) do not necessarily reflect the antagonistic nature of emotions against the government's behavior.

Therefore, this study focuses on situational anti-government sentiment and conceptualizes it as publics' hostile emotions toward an incumbent government's problematic behaviors. It refers to the *temporary, emotional state experienced by publics toward the incumbent government, exhibiting frustration, opposition, and anger about the current government's problems in political, economic, and societal aspects which publics perceive as conflicting with their expectations*. Existing literature has consistently found that anti-government sentiment is associated with people's attitudes, evaluations, and expectations about their government's performance, level of democracy, and power of government (e.g., Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2010, 2012). 3 When publics perceive the government's behavior as deviating from their expectations or harming public interest, they develop and express negative emotions toward the government. Anti-government sentiment is an affective consequence of people's perceptions, evaluations, and expectations about their government. However, this antagonistic reaction to a government does not necessarily reflect the government's actual performance (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010).

In conceptualizing anti-government sentiment, we adopt a multiaspect approach to exploring the concept of emotion. Emotions are complex and could influence individuals' affective experiences, cognitive processes, and goal-directed behaviors (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). Beyond affective elements (e.g., anger and frustration about the government), the concept of emotion also has a perceptual/thinking element (i.e., cognitive aspect), particularly in the appraisal process about the government and its use of power. When publics recognize their government's behavior to be problematic, they may engage in various cognitive–emotional activities, including sensing emotional stimuli, appraising the experience, and eliciting control mechanisms, to deal with the problematic situation (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). This sentiment is also considered functional as it increases people's motivations for problem-solving behaviors. Young (1975) notes that "now the truth is that affective arousals do organize attitudes, interests and aversions, motives, traits or personality, and similar dispositions" (p. 90). It could be a "strongly or weakly motivating" and/or "highly cognitive or low-cognitive" emotion (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981, p. 352), depending on publics' perceptions and evaluations of the problems.

Understanding the nature of anti-government sentiment and its antecedents could help governments to narrow publics' perceived discrepancies between their expectations and experiences with the government, and contribute to research on governments' public engagement strategies for increasing publics' political support and decreasing the impact of publics' negative attitudes and behaviors on a government's performance and policies. Thus, in the following section, on the basis of Owen and Dennis' (2001) theory of political support, we propose the following three antecedents to the formation of anti-government sentiment.

2.2 Theoretical framework for antecedents to anti-government sentiment: Theory of political support

Publics' attitudes toward the government are influenced by both long-term factors, including traditional skepticism and postmaterial values, and short-term factors, such as people's perceptions about performance, policy, probity, and denunciation (Orren, 1997). In their attempt to improve previous theoretical approaches to political support (e.g., Easton, 1975), Owen and Dennis (2001) identified six criteria that form people's judgments about the government, including perceptions of (a) effective linkages between citizens and government; (b) government decision makers as having good qualifications; (c) government decision makers as having good personal qualities; (d) fairness of the political decision-making process; (e) effective outputs that resolve major societal problems; and (f) fair outcomes of public policy.

These criteria propose the importance of communication, leadership, and fairness in influencing publics' judgments about the government. The first criterion emphasizes interactions between citizens and government. Effective linkages will not be possible without proper practices in communication. To understand the degree of perceived government responsiveness to citizens' needs and interests, it is necessary to measure publics' perceptions of government communication. The second and third criteria are related to decision makers' leadership capacity, including their degree of sympathy, empathy, compassion, and concern for citizens (Owen & Dennis, 2001). In particular, empathy is crucial for building trust between a leader and their subordinates (Jin, 2010). The fourth and sixth criteria emphasize the government's ethical practices, especially the use of

appropriate standards to ensure fairness in decision making, which would allow government to produce fair outcomes for its citizens.

On the basis of the above discussion, we propose three possible antecedents to anti-government sentiment: communication strategy, compassionate leadership, and ethics failure. Publics' negative sentiments about their government are related to their perceptions of its performance and leadership (Pfau et al., 1998). In particular, when the government's performance is related to an ethics failure (e.g., corruption), citizens feel that the government has betrayed their political trust (Chang & Chu, 2006), as a result of which political distrust increases (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003). Finally, various government communication programs could influence publics' perceptions of government performance (Zhu, Lu, & Shi, 2013). As government communication is often seen as being one way, using spin and obfuscation to achieve a certain agenda (Glenny, 2008), government's choice of a communication strategy could be detrimental to the effective linkages between citizens and the government.

We posit that three proposed antecedents, which reflect publics' perceptions about the government's problematic behaviors, could trigger anti-government sentiment as an emotional reaction. J.-N. Kim and Kim (2009) and Shin and Han (2016) suggest that publics exhibit an emotional reaction as an outcome of situational perceptions about problems. Emotional responses can emerge immediately after cognitive appraisal of a problematic situation is made (Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 2001; So, Kuang, & Cho, 2016). In the following sections, we discuss these three antecedents and hypotheses in detail.

2.3 Antecedents to anti-government sentiment

2.3.1 Ethics failure of government

When ethical dysfunctionality occurs in public administration, it not only harms citizens and society (Bruhn, 2005; Chua & Rahman, 2011) but also deteriorates political trust in the government (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2010; Salminen & Ikola-Norrbacka, 2010). A government's ethics failure is conceptualized as unethical behaviors of public servants and governmental organizations, which could result in harm to individuals and society, as well as violations of justice (Zajac, 1996, 1997). An example of such behavior is corruption. Because the government is entrusted with the authority to manage public resources, these violations are detrimental to public interest. Publics lose faith in the government when they see a lack of integrity in government leaders and public officials (Orren, 1997). In other words, when publics' expectations for a government's ethical behavior are unmet, their negative sentiment about the government grows. In addition, S. Kim and Krishna (2017a) found that if organizations do not ethically manage their behaviors, they are more likely to be involved in conflicts with key stakeholders and to suffer from problematic stakeholder relationships. Extending this logic, we posit that publics' perceptions of unethical governmental behavior may violate their expectations of the government, and as a result, they develop antagonistic sentiments toward the incumbent government. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Perceived ethics failure of government is positively associated with anti-government sentiment among publics.

2.3.2 Compassionate leadership

For decades, and in diverse disciplines, leadership has received much scholarly attention and has been given many different definitions (e.g., Caldwell, Bischoff, & Karri, 2002; Palmer, 2009). Because the government is entrusted with the stewardship of public resources, people have high expectations of government leaders. Therefore, government leaders should behave in ways to convince publics they are acting responsibly (Mitchell & Scott,1987). Public administrators should maintain a high level of trustworthiness and should understand citizens' viewpoints when interacting with them (Jun & Kim, 2002).

Leadership refers to the relationship between leaders and followers, in which the leader is responsible for interpreting reality, making decisions, and implementing goals (Enderle, 1987). A leader's display of emotion is an indicator of their intentions and sincerity and could influence how they are perceived by publics (Humphrey, 2002). Traits of transformational leadership, such as empathy, are crucial for establishing employees' trust in leaders (Jin, 2010). Defined as "the ability to comprehend another's feelings and to re-experience them oneself" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 194), empathy refers to considering, sensing, and understanding others' feelings and viewpoints along with other factors in the decision-making process (Goleman, 2011). Transformational leaders gain followers' trust as they display traits of empathy, compassion, sensitivity, relationship building, and innovation; they are strong in scanning the environment, identifying key elements, developing a vision, and planning accordingly to emotionally engage their followers (Jin, 2010).

This study examines compassionate leadership as a key trait of transformational leaders (i.e., empathy) in the context of government–public relationship. We propose that government leadership would be perceived as positive when the leader shows high levels of empathy toward the problems or issues affecting citizens. Contrarily, when publics perceive their leader as being incapable of displaying empathy, they may feel that the leader does not understand their problems and is not performing properly. As a result, they may exhibit their hostile emotions toward their government. On the basis of the above discussion, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2. Perceived compassionate leadership of government is negatively associated with anti-government sentiment among publics.

2.3.3 Buffering strategy as a government's communication strategy

Despite the frequently interchangeable use of the terms *political communication* and *government communication*, government communication refers to apolitical communication activities concerning government policies and services for the purpose of governing a country (Glenny, 2008). Political communication scholars have looked at the relationship between exposure to media and publics' attitudes toward the government (e.g., Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2014). In addition, several studies have investigated how media relations strategies are used to influence public opinion (e.g., Laursen & Valentini, 2013). Because a negative image of, and dissatisfaction with, the government mainly reflects publics' *perceptions* rather than its actual performance (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010), government communicators ought to understand publics' perceptions of the government's behavior and communication. They should adopt

practices to respond to publics' needs, seek feedback, and dissemination relevant information to publics using a variety of channels (Fairbanks, Plowman, & Rawlins, 2007). Publics' perceptions of government affect the success of government communication and policy implementation (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010). However, the question of how publics actually perceive government communication strategies is yet to be explored.

Although different government bodies may use different communication strategies, we draw upon Grunig's (2009) two functions of public relations for the purpose of our research. He classified the functions of public relations into two: *buffering* and *bridging*. When an organization is inclined to use a buffering strategy, it seeks to create positive images of the organization's behaviors among publics, even if the behaviors are problematic (S. Kim & J.-N. Kim, 2016; S. Kim & Krishna, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). As a result, the organization can continue its problematic behaviors without correcting them; it seeks to influence and shape publics' perceptions about the organization, its products or services, or behaviors in order to create a favorable environment for its operations (Grunig, 2009). Contrarily, if an organization is prone to a *bridging* strategy, it aims to narrow the gaps between its publics' expectations and the organization's actions and build mutually beneficial relationships with them (Grunig, 2009).

Negative public perceptions about government communication could become a constraint for a favorable government–public relationship (Liu & Horsley, 2007). When government communication is perceived as propaganda and spin, public cynicism about the government increases (Graber, 2003; S. Kim & Krishna, 2018). Therefore, the use of a buffering strategy 5— that is, using communication to create favorable images of government and manipulate external perceptions through messages and images—could be related to anti-government sentiment among publics. When publics view government communication as manipulative, with the purpose of persuading them to behave in a way favorable to the government, they would perceive that the government was functioning for its own benefit rather than for society's and would develop negative public sentiment. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H3. The perceived buffering strategy of government is positively associated with anti-government sentiment among publics.

3 METHOD

3.1 Sample and data collection

We administered an online survey in South Korea through a research company called Macromill Embrain Co. in March 2015. The probability quota sampling method was used to ensure that the sample is representative of the South Korean population based on population statistics (Ministry of the Interior, 2015). Participants were provided with remuneration according to the reward policy of the company. A total of 1,125 participants participated, from whom 1,112 valid responses were collected. The gender breakdown was 559 (50.3%) males and 553 (49.7%) females. Of the respondents, 193 were aged 20 to 29 years old (17.4%), 219 were aged 30 to 39 years old (19.7%), 275 were aged 40 to 49 years old (24.7%), 271 were aged 50 to 59 years old (24.4%), and 154 were aged 60 or above (13.8%). The demographics of the participants were close to the quota sampling we designed based on population statistics (male:female, 50.9%:49.1%; 20–29 years old:

18.4%, 30–39 years old: 21.3%, 40–49 years old: 24.6%, 50–59 years old: 22.7%, and 60 years and older: 13%).

3.2 Instrumentation

To test the proposed framework of anti-government sentiment, we measured (a) perceived ethics failure of government using four items created based on Zajac's (1996, 1997) conceptualization, (b) perceived compassionate leadership of government by adopting and revising Boyatzis' (2001) four items of empathy, and (c) perceived government's communication strategy by adopting and revising S. Kim's (2014) five items of buffering strategy (Table 1). As for the anti-government sentiment, we reviewed two salient studies in political science measuring publics' attitudes toward the government: Miller (1974) and the Pew study (Pew Research Center for People & the Press, 2010, 2012). We adopted the items from those studies and then developed them as new scales (Table 1).

After examining the descriptive statistics (Table 1), we examined each variable's reliability. All variables reached an acceptable Cronbach's alpha level of reliability (Table 1). Then, correlations were tested between the summed items for each construct (Table 2).

TABLE 1 Measures, descriptive statistics, and reliability

Variable (Cronbach's α)		Mean	SD	Item
Ethics failure (EF; α = 0.91)	EF1	3.97	0.97	I feel that the behaviors of public servants or government organizations in our country often result in fraudulent use of public funds, materials, and facilities.
	EF2	3.85	0.98	I feel that the behaviors of public servants or government organizations in our country often result in conflicts-of-interest in public decision-making.
	EF3	3.74	0.97	I feel that the behaviors of public servants or government organizations in our country often result in violations of individuals' civil or human rights or dignity.
	EF4	3.85	0.96	I feel that the behaviors of public servants or government organizations in our country result in injustice or harm to individuals.
Compassionate leadership (CL; α = 0.95)	CL1	2.13	1.03	The leader of our government (president) gives people the opportunity to speak their minds.
	CL2	2.11	1.05	The leader of our government (president) assesses the underlying or root causes of people's problems.
	CL3	2.19	1.10	The leader of our government (president) pays attention and listens well to the voice of the people.
	CL4	2.21	1.13	This leader (president) shows sensitivity and understanding of people's emotions.
Buffering strategy (BS; α = 0.86)	BS1	3.36	1.10	The creation and dissemination of strategic messages to influence public perception of the government as the government wishes is the key to our government's public relations programs.
	BS2	3.84	1.05	When creating strategic messages in its public relations program, I think our government values effective advocating of the position of our government more than reflecting the needs of the public.
	BS3	3.63	1.02	I think our government's public relations program is quite analogous to image management or image creation.
	BS4	3.66	1.09	The role of our government's communication program is to provide explanation and rationalization for its activities and to create the image that its activities are legitimate although they might not be.
	BS5	3.67	1.08	I think our government believes that public relations is to protect the government from public opposition or negative public behaviors, by creating favorable impressions of its behaviors although its behaviors are not necessarily decent.
Anti-government sentiment (AS; α = 0.94)	AS1	3.66	1.09	I am against the excessive dominance and power of our government over citizens.
	AS2	3.62	1.12	Our government abuses its power over its citizens and broad society.
	AS3	3.71	1.09	Our government enjoys too much benefit and as a result the needs of broader society are not addressed.
	AS4	3.74	1.05	I am furious about our government's decisions and/or behaviors.
	AS5	3.23	1.14	The behaviors of our government are enemies of broader society and public interest.

TABLE 2 Correlations of summated items

	Anti-government sentiment	Ethics failure	Compassionate leadership	Buffering strategy
Anti-government sentiment	1			
Ethics failure	0.517**	1		
Compassionate leadership	−0.654**	−0.385**	1	
Buffering strategy	0.500**	0.388**	−0.424**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

TABLE 3 Exploratory factor analysis for anti-government sentiment

	Factor loading
AS1. I am against the excessive dominance and power of our government over citizens.	0.884
AS2. Our government abuses its power over its citizens and broad society.	0.918
AS3. Our government enjoys too much benefit and as a result the needs of broader society are not addressed.	0.889
AS4. I am furious about our government's decisions and/or behaviors.	0.897
AS5. The behaviors of our government are enemies of broader society and public interest.	0.849
Eigenvalues	3.938
Explained variance	78.76

Note. Exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

As there were no validated scales for anti-government sentiment, we performed EFA using PCA and oblimin rotation, followed by CFA, to check the validity and reliability. IBM SPSS version 23 and IBM SPSS AMOS version 22 were used for data analysis. After testing the validity of anti-government scales via EFA and CFA, we tested the three hypotheses in our proposed model using SEM. SEM was chosen because it allows researchers to test complex relationships between several variables and examine mediating relationships. Maximum likelihood procedures were selected for data analysis, because they generate consistent parameter estimates even when assumptions of normality are violated (Yuan & Bentler, 2007). Missing data were handled with expected maximization imputation. Standardized coefficients are reported. Kline's (1998) two-step procedure was undertaken in order to test the hypotheses. First, the measurement model was initially tested. Second, we tested the proposed structural model. To assess data fit, Hu and Bentler's (1999) joint criteria approach was used, whereby comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.95, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.10, or root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.06 and SRMR ≤ 0.10 is considered a good model.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Factor analyses for anti-government sentiment

Before performing EFA using PCA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix in each country revealed the presence of coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser–Meyser–Oklin measure value was 0.935 for the PCA of anti-government sentiment, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.6. The Bartlett's test of sphericity reached statistical significance $(\chi^2 = 4{,}554.478, df = 10, p < 0.001)$. PCA revealed the presence of one component with an eigenvalue exceeding 1, explaining 78.76 of the variance (Table 3). After PCA, CFA was also conducted (CFI = 0.996, SRMR = 0.011, RMSEA = 0.064 when $\chi^2 = 22.341, df = 4, p < 0.001$). Both the EFA and the CFA suggest that this scale of anti-government sentiment has sound explanatory power in explicating anti-government sentiment.

**TABLE 3** Exploratory factor analysis for anti-government sentiment

	Factor loading
AS1. I am against the excessive dominance and power of our government over citizens.	0.884
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AS4. I am furious about our government's decisions and/or behaviors.	0.897
AS5. The behaviors of our government are enemies of broader society and public interest.	0.849
Eigenvalues	3.938
Explained variance	78.76

Note. Exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis.

4.2 SEM analysis

To test the hypotheses, the measurement model that included all the measures of the analyzed variables was tested. The measurement model was found to have good model fit (CFI = 0.972, SRMR = 0.040, RMSEA = 0.057 when χ^2 = 593.194, df = 129, $p < 0.001$). Then, the structural model was used to test possible relationships among ethics failure, compassionate leadership, communication strategy, and anti-government sentiment. Considering the composition of demographics, age 8 was used as a control variable in the SEM model to clearly identify the relationships between anti-government sentiment and its antecedents.

The test demonstrated a good data–model fit (CFI = 0.970, SRMR = 0.039, RMSEA = 0.056 when χ^2 = 638.801, df = 143, $p < 0.001$) according to Hu and Bentler's (1999) joint criteria approach. The first hypothesis predicted that perceived ethics failure of government would be positively associated with anti-government sentiment among publics (H1). The relationship between perceived ethics failures of government and anti-government sentiment was supported, with a positive standardized path coefficient (H1: path = 0.261, $p < 0.001$). Second, it was predicted that perceived compassionate leadership would be negatively associated with anti-government sentiment (H2). The standardized path coefficient for H2 was negative and significant (H2: path = −0.457, $p < 0.001$), meaning that if the government's leadership is perceived as having a low level of empathy, it is likely that publics would develop anti-government sentiment. Third, the perceived use of the government's buffering strategy as a communication strategy was hypothesized to have a positive relationship with anti-government sentiment (H3). H3 was also supported with a positive standardized path coefficient (H3: path = 0.247, $p < 0.001$; Figure 1).
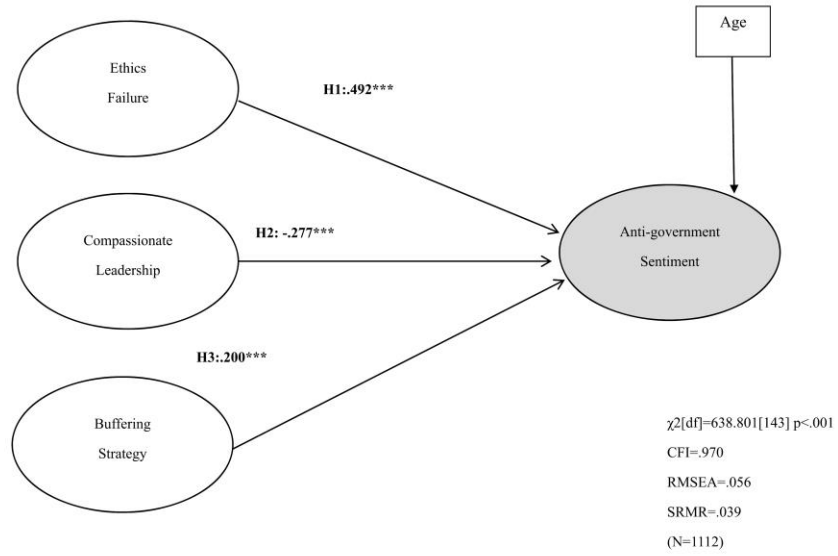
FIGURE 1 Structural equation modeling. CFI: comparative fit index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; SRMR: standardized root mean square residual

5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is imperative for policymakers to understand the dynamics of public sentiment to gain publics' support and reflect this knowledge in their policies. To provide a better understanding of anti-government sentiment, this study tested a theoretical framework and found that people who find their government's ethics failure, use of buffering strategy as a communication strategy, and lack of compassionate leadership problematic are likely to develop anti-government sentiment toward their incumbent government.

Responding to the call for more research on government communication (Gelders & Ihlen,2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007), this study enhances understanding of public sentiment by examining the causes of anti-government sentiment. It is one of few interdisciplinary studies to bring together the disciplines of politics and public relations to better understand anti-government sentiment. Even though extant literature on political support has informed that there are several antecedents to the formation of anti-government sentiment, a mixed use of similar terms was identified as an obstacle to providing a better understanding of anti-government sentiment. There is also a dearth of research that brings together and measures such antecedents.

A noteworthy finding was the high magnitude of impact of perceived compassionate leadership on the development of anti-government sentiment compared with other antecedents. Future research may investigate why compassionate leadership was especially significant in Korea by exploring the broader range of emotions that Koreans experience when confronting different political and social situations as well as other possible contexts and factors. It may be also necessary to test if the same framework is applicable to other countries.

This study also makes a theoretical contribution to the research on public affairs in the context of government–public relationships by shifting scholarly attention from political trust/distrust (dispositional traits) and quality of OPR (relational dimension) to situational anti-government sentiment (affective state). To resolve the issue of the definitional ambiguity of anti-government sentiment (Owen & Dennis, 2001)—such as the confusion caused by similar terms in political communication (e.g., political trust, distrust, cynicism, and skepticism) being used interchangeably—we have conceptualized the concept and proposed improved measurement scales. In addition, although relationship management theory in public relations (e.g., Hung, 2005) has explored a broader perspective of OPR, it has not adequately addressed the issue of public sentiment, that is, how and why people develop antagonistic sentiments toward the problem-causing entity or the organization. Our approach differs from the relational approach (e.g., Moon & Rhee, 2013) and interprets anti-government sentiment as publics' emotional reactions to the problems instead of an indicator of negative government–public relationship quality. This study has made an attempt to look into the complexity of emotions triggered (Plutchik, 1982) in the context of government communication.

This study extends the approaches used in existing research to better explain anti-government sentiment. First, using Zajac's (1996, 1997) conceptualization, we incorporated government behavior as well as that of its officials to conceptualize ethics failure. Previous literature on ethics adopting the "bad apples" perspective (e.g., Stead, Worrell, & Stead, 1990) tends to emphasize individual characteristics, values, and employee behaviors rather than the organization's behavior

as a whole (the "bad barrel" perspective). Second, this study has taken the first step toward exploring publics' perceptions of government communication strategies by examining how people actually perceive and evaluate their government's communication strategy, as well as the significance of compassionate leadership. To narrow their distance from society, governments should seek to understand publics by integrating consultations with citizens into their communication activities (Heinze, Schneider, & Ferié, 2013; Ramsey, 2015).

This study has several limitations. First, we acknowledge the possibility of different views about anti-government sentiment and believe that it is possible for this sentiment to become an individual's predisposition that guides their evaluations of and reactions to their government. Future research could measure a cumulative anti-government sentiment by designing a longitudinal study that spans several years or several regimes. Second, it is possible that certain factors beyond the identified antecedents in this study could have affected publics' negative sentiment toward their government. We did not investigate the effects of specific social or political issues. Future studies could examine the effects of situational perceptual variables on publics' emotional reactions based on J.-N. Kim and Grunig's (2011) situational theory of problem solving. For example, situational variables, such as involvement recognition, could be examined to distinguish people who are interested in political or civic issues from those who are indifferent. This could help identify new methods of public segmentation to build effective government–public relationships. Third, our proposed measures of anti-government sentiment could be constrained by the limitations in its conceptualization and measurement. We believe that the scales proposed in this study could be further improved through rigorous investigation and examination. Future research may suggest better and clearer instruments, considering the variety of emotions people exhibit toward their governments (Owen & Dennis, 2001).

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