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Published in:
Journal of applied social psychology

DOI:
[10.1111/jasp.12514](https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12514)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2018

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van Zomeren, M., Saguy, T., Mazzoni, D., & Cicognani, E. (2018). The curious, context-dependent case of anger: Explaining voting intentions in three different national elections. *Journal of applied social psychology*, 48(6), 329-338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12514>

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The curious, context-dependent case of anger: Explaining voting intentions in three different national elections

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Abstract

Collective action is typically studied in social protest contexts and predicted by different motivations (i.e., ingroup identification and efficacy beliefs, and outgroup-directed anger). Assuming that voting to some extent reflects a form of collective action, we tested whether these three different motivations predicted voting in Dutch, Israeli, and Italian national election contexts. Based on previous meta-analyses on voting and collective action, we hypothesized that *identification* with and *efficacy beliefs* regarding this party would motivate voting across the different elections (i.e., context-independent effects). As for anger, we predicted more context-dependent effects, depending on whether the anger is targeting the previous government or at the political system at large. Results were largely in line with predictions, showing the relatively context-independent motivational power of party identification and efficacy beliefs, and clearly context-dependent effects for anger. Specifically, we found little support for a similar motivational power of anger targeting previous government policies, but anger targeting politics in general demotivated Dutch and Israeli participants to vote (interpreted as an expression of political cynicism), while curiously motivating Italian participants to vote (interpreted as a desire for system change from “old” to “new” politics). We discuss these findings in the context of voting in national elections, and recommend further integration of the voting and social protest literatures.

The questionnaire also included exploratory variables such as opposition to previous government policies, trust in politics, and voter identification. Including those variables allowed us to explore the predictive power of perceptions underlying anger toward the government (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2004), trust in the political process and system (Smets & Van Ham, 2013), and an “active identity” (e.g., to be a voter is to vote; Bryan, Walton, Rogers, & Dweck, 2011). In the Supporting Information, we report findings for these variables. In the Israeli sample only, we also included anger about previous government *security* policies, but this did not predict voting intentions and thus was not analyzed further.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Individuals' participation in social protest, such as demonstrations, petitions, and sit-ins is typically explained through different motivations (i.e., *ingroup identification* and *efficacy beliefs*, and *outgroup-directed anger*; for a meta-analysis, see Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Such collective action is traditionally defined as any action undertaken by an individual on behalf of a group to achieve the group's goals

(Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990; see also Becker, 2012). As most research on collective action focuses on participation in social protest, little is known about whether *voting in national elections* can be understood through the same predictors. This is not unlikely because such contexts typically involve individuals' acting on behalf of political parties to achieve group goals, which implies that a relevant ingroup will typically be contextually available. Supporting this view, meta-analyses of the voting and collective action literatures converge to the extent that ingroup identification and efficacy beliefs have been found to be important motivations for social protest and for voting behavior (Smets & Van Ham, 2013; Van Zomeren et al., 2008).

For anger, however, the picture may be more complex. Outgroup-directed anger (e.g., anger targeting the government, authorities, or advantaged group in society) plays a prominent role in explaining why people protest, but little is known about the potential of such anger to motivate voting in national elections (cf. Garry, 2014; Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011; Weber, 2013). It is important to know more about this unknown motivational potential of anger because this potentially provides new insights into the psychology of voting turnout. Perhaps particularly in

times of recent emotional election campaigns and unexpected election results (e.g., Brexit, Trump), this potential seems intuitively plausible, yet requires a theoretical social-psychological rationale and testable hypotheses.

We provide those by proposing that outgroup-directed anger is somewhat of a curious case, as its motivational power is likely to be strongly context-dependent. This is because anger relies on the contextual availability of a relevant outgroup as its target. Whereas, this is often a given in social protest contexts (e.g., the government, authorities, or advantaged outgroup), this is not a given in national election contexts, not in the least because such a context requires individuals to consider and choose which party to vote for, rather than which party to vote against. In a similar vein, outgroup-directed anger can have *different* targets. For example, those who feel anger toward the previous government and its policies may go to the ballots in the hope of voting in a new party in government. Those who feel angry at the political system as a whole, however, may not even go to the ballots (e.g., as an expression of political cynicism), whereas others who similarly feel anger at the system may go to the ballots to change that very system (e.g., to replace “old” with “new politics”). The main aims of the current research are therefore to (a) empirically evaluate the efficacy of applying these predictors of social protest to voting in national election contexts, and (b) test and explore the curious, context-dependent motivational potential of anger in such contexts. We seek to achieve these aims by testing our ideas in the context of three different national elections held in the Netherlands, Israel, and Italy (in the period of 2012–2013).

1.1 | The curious, context-dependent case of anger

Within social protest contexts, collective action is typically predicted by ingroup identification and efficacy, and outgroup-directed anger (across different groups, disadvantages, issues, countries, and samples; for a meta-analysis see Van Zomeren et al., 2008; for primary research see Becker & Tausch, 2013; Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011; Shi, Hao, Saeri, & Cui, 2015; Tabri & Conway, 2011).¹ This is not surprising because social protest contexts typically include (a) a relevant ingroup that seeks to achieve group goals through collective action (e.g., changing one's collective disadvantage or position in society), and (b) a

contextually available and relevant target for anger (e.g., the government, authorities, or advantaged group in society).

This type of social structure may not necessarily be similar for national election contexts because such contexts typically focus on ingroups (e.g., political parties) with group goals that individuals may seek to achieve through the act of voting for them (rather than voting against another party). Furthermore, national election contexts may or may not include the same contextually available relevant target for anger. It follows that the two ingroup motivations should reflect context-independent motivational forces, whereas the motivational potential of outgroup-directed anger should show a much stronger context- and target-dependency. We discuss each in turn below.

1.1.1 | Ingroup identification and efficacy beliefs

Within social protest contexts, individuals' *group identification* has been found to be a reliable predictor of collective action (e.g., Giguère & Lalonde, 2010; Leach et al., 2008; Simon et al., 1998; Van Zomeren et al., 2008), particularly when it concerns individuals' identification with *action-oriented* groups (Simon et al., 1998; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). For instance, those who identify with a social movement will be more likely to become active on behalf of that movement because they feel an “internal obligation to participate,” as the political has become personal for them (Stürmer & Simon, 2004; Turner-Zwinkels, Van Zomeren, & Postmes, 2015).

The second ingroup-focused motivation, *group efficacy*, reflects the group goals that individuals want to achieve through collective action. Defined as the belief that the group is able to achieve group goals through collective action (see Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; Van Zomeren et al., 2008), group efficacy reflects a form of self-efficacy, which generally refers to the motivation to exercise agency through the faculty of forethought (Bandura, 1997). Group efficacy beliefs typically predict collective action positively (for a meta-analysis, see Van Zomeren et al., 2008; see also Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Saguy, & Van Zomeren, 2014; Corcoran, Pettinichio, & Young, 2011; Homsey et al., 2006; Tausch et al., 2011; Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012; Van Zomeren, 2013, 2015).

Interestingly, Smets and Van Ham (2013) found in their meta-analysis of studies in journals outside psychology that two psychological predictors of voting turnout were *party identification* (i.e., an individual preference for a party) and, more weakly predictive and more variable in its effect, *political efficacy* (operationalized as individuals' beliefs that one can influence politics and that the political system will respond constructively). Party identification is indeed likely to be the relevant ingroup for voting in national elections, just as identification with an action or activist group is relevant for participation in actions of that group. Political efficacy beliefs, however, include both an ingroup and outgroup component, which in the collective action literature is more restricted to the ingroup (i.e., ingroup efficacy beliefs; Van Zomeren, 2016). We reasoned that the ingroup component is the common denominator of these two variables and therefore used party efficacy beliefs as our operationalization. Across the three different national election contexts, we expect individuals' party identification

¹One way to conceptualize these three motivations is through grounding them in individuals' view of themselves as a group member (rather than as a unique individual; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Group identification increases such self-perception, which enables beliefs about the group's efficacy to achieve group goals, and anger toward the outgroup or system based in perceptions of group-based unfairness (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). The assumed meta-theory here is thus not one that revolves around individuals as “rational actors” (see Smets & Van Ham, 2013), but around individuals as “psychological group members” (Turner et al., 1987; Van Zomeren, 2014) who view themselves as group members and seek to achieve group goals (e.g., Ellemers, 1993; Louis, Taylor, & Neil, 2004; Van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). We thus assume that intentions to protest reflect goal-directed processes (e.g., Abrams & Grant, 2012; Simon et al., 1998), which fits with modern views on group identity, efficacy beliefs and emotions such as anger as reflecting goal-directed processes (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009; Van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012; Weber, 2013; but see Stürmer & Simon, 2009).

and efficacy beliefs to positively predict their motivation to vote in national elections.

1.1.2 | Outgroup-directed anger

In social protest contexts, the emotional experience of anger requires a relevant *outgroup* as its target, which is typically contextually available (Klandermans, 1997; Runciman, 1966; Solak, Jost, Sümer, & Clore, 2012; Walker & Smith, 2002). Indeed, anger is an approach emotion (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009; Van Zomeren et al., 2012) that reflects the emotional experience of group-based unfairness that has been found to be predictive of collective action (Abrams & Grant, 2012; Shi et al., 2015; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; Solak et al., 2012; Tabri & Conway, 2011; Tausch et al., 2011; Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; Zhou & Wang, 2012). Because social protest contexts often include a relevant outgroup that can be blamed for unfairness, it may not be surprising that outgroup-directed anger is such a prominent predictor in these contexts.

By contrast, the motivational power of anger with respect to voting in national elections seems unclear, precisely because of its dependency on the availability of relevant outgroups as targets. Its motivational power is nevertheless important to test and explore because it signals a need to understand better *when* anger, if at all, motivates voting in national elections. For example, when no relevant outgroup is contextually available, there is no target for anger and thus anger has no motivational potential (Van Zomeren, 2016). But when relevant outgroups are contextually available, then it is important to understand what qualifies as “relevant.”

This line of thought led us to differentiate between two targets of anger in the context of voting in national elections. First, we focused on anger targeting *the previous government's policies*, which would be conceptually similar to the group-based unfairness that underlies the group-based anger that predicts social protest. Such anger should therefore *motivate* individuals to vote. But because voting in national elections occurs in a broader political system, we wanted to differentiate such anger from anger targeting *politics in general* (i.e., the political system as a whole). Such anger should generally *demotivate* individuals to vote in national elections, presumably as an expression of political cynicism (Agger, Goldstein, & Pearl, 1961).

This context-dependency of anger could go even further, as in some contexts anger toward politics in general might actually motivate people to vote. This is actually what appeared to be happening in the Italian context we studied, where a social protest group (the Five Star Movement) turned into a political party in order to change the system of “old politics.” In such a context, we reasoned that one could expect that anger toward politics in general would be aimed at changing the political system through voting, rather than at just changing governments (which would simply be “more of the same”). If so, then such anger could motivate, rather than demotivate, voting in national elections. In this respect, the Italian election context enabled an explorative test of a new prediction that would be difficult to derive from the social protest literature alone.

1.2 | Hypotheses

We expected party identification and party efficacy beliefs to motivate voting in national elections across the three different national election contexts we studied (Hypotheses 1 and 2). For anger, we differentiated between anger targeting previous government policies and politics in general, while expecting the former to motivate voting (Hypothesis 3) and the latter to demotivate voting (Hypothesis 4). More exploratively, we reasoned that in the context in which system change was a real issue and thus made politics in general a contextually available and relevant target of anger (i.e., Italy), such anger would motivate voting in national elections (Hypothesis 5). Together, this set of predictions suggests context-independent motivational effects of party identification and efficacy, and much more context-dependent effects of anger.

2 | METHODS

We conducted the same survey study using samples from three different countries that faced national elections within the period of half a year (the Netherlands in September 2012, Israel in January 2013, and Italy in February 2013). Our choice for these national election contexts was based on criteria that required any selected country to have a democratic political system that allows multiple parties, to typically have coalition governments, and to have a tradition of relatively high voter turnout (e.g., López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002). This is because the presence of multiple political parties and power-sharing coalitions makes it more likely that identifying with one party does not automatically imply being against another outgroup (as would arguably be more likely the case in a two-party political system).

Against this backdrop, these three contexts differed systematically in at least one key respect. That is, whereas the Dutch election context did not include any newcomer parties, the Israeli and Italian election contexts did so, although in different ways. Specifically, the Israeli election context featured two newcomer parties aiming for change *within* the political system and thus focused on changing previous government policies, whereas the Italian election context featured a newcomer party (i.e., the Five Star Movement) aiming for change *of* the political system itself (i.e., marking the end of “old politics”). These naturally occurring differences between the political contexts fit nicely with our focus on different targets of anger and enable a test of their hypothesized effects on voting.

Obviously, many other differences between the three contexts exist that are not under our control.² We nevertheless reasoned that this could also be a strength of our research design: Precisely because

²Each country faced different challenges at the time of elections, with the Netherlands being most concerned with economic issues, Israel with economic as well as national-security issues, and Italy with economic issues as well as issues about the political system as a whole and a general distrust of politics. Furthermore, the election campaign in the Netherlands was a race between two center-left and center-right parties, whereas in Israel and Italy, new parties took part in the elections and achieved a sizeable percentage of votes. However, in Israel the newcomers joined the government, whereas in Italy the new party out of principle refused to help “old politics” to power. Furthermore, the study was conducted in different languages (Dutch, Hebrew, and Italian; translated by the authors) and sampled different populations for reasons of convenience.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics for key and control variables (M = mean, SD = standard deviation)

	The Netherlands		Israel		Italy	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Intentions to vote	6.53	1.15	6.21	1.62	6.04	1.72
2. Party identification	3.95	1.20	4.80	1.39	3.97	1.26
3. Party efficacy	4.62	1.25	5.11	1.38	4.79	1.37
4. Anger about previous government policies	3.36	1.49	4.76	1.81	3.75	1.78
5. Anger about politics	2.55	1.36	4.34	1.66	5.47	1.47
6. Left-right	3.48	1.47	4.59	1.47	3.05	1.60
7. Progressive-conservative	3.07	1.13	3.28	1.66	2.39	1.31
8. Social-liberal	3.50	1.40	3.13	1.43	3.64	1.57
9. Age	20.73	2.51	39.42	13.45	23.72	3.66
10. Gender (nr men/women)	24–140		100–104		104–123	

of such differences, replicating support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (about party identification and efficacy beliefs) across the different national election contexts would attest to their generalizability. To acknowledge these differences between samples, we decided to analyze the data *within* each sample, interpreting support for our hypotheses in each sample as converging evidence. Below, we first describe the three samples in detail, after which we present our measures used in the survey (see Appendix for complete information).

2.1 | Dutch sample

The Dutch sample was a convenience sample of 172 first-year students at a Dutch university (for gender, age, and political orientation characteristics, see Table 1). Data were collected via hardcopy questionnaires in a large lecture room in the break of a statistics lecture in the week before the national election. The data of eight participants (= 4.65%) could not be analyzed because of systematic missing values (across samples we used the criterion that any participant who would have missing values for one or more of the full scales of party efficacy, party identification, outgroup or system-directed anger and intentions to vote would not be included in the analysis; nevertheless, result across studies showed the same pattern of results with these individuals included or excluded). None of the participants in this sample were members of a political party, or active for a party.

National elections took place on September 12, 2012. The serving prime minister was Mark Rutte, who had led the previous Dutch government with an unstable coalition composed of center-right liberals and Christian-democrats (supported by the right-wing populist party, who did not want to be in government). Turnout would be 74.57% of eligible voters and election results would show victories for the center-right liberals (26.58%) and center-left social-democratic party (24.84%), who formed a coalition with Rutte as the prime minister.

2.2 | Israeli sample

The second sample, recruited in Israel, was a convenience sample of 209 Israeli participants (see Table 1 for gender, age, and political

orientation characteristics). Data were collected via an online survey in the week prior to the elections. Participants were part of an online pool of respondents who were compensated around \$5 for their participation. The data of five participants (= 2.39%) could not be analyzed because of systematic missing values. Eleven of the participants were members of a political party and six were active for a party.

National elections took place on January 22, 2013. The serving prime minister was Benjamin Netanyahu, who had led the previous Israeli government with a stable coalition composed of a majority of right-wing parties and ultra-orthodox parties. Compared to previous ballots, two newcomer parties were the right-wing “Jewish-Home” led by Naftali Bennett and the centrist “There is a Future” led by Yair Lapid. Turnout would be 66.6% of eligible voters and election results would show that the right-wing Likud party led by Netanyahu received most votes (23.3%). A similar percentage of votes went to the two newcomers—the new centrist party lead by Lapid (14.33%) and the newly formed right-wing party led by Bennett (9%). Netanyahu formed a coalition with both these new parties.

2.3 | Italian sample

The third sample, recruited in Italy, was a convenience sample of 231 students at an Italian university (for age, gender, and political orientation characteristics see Table 1). The data of three participants (= 1.30%) could not be analyzed because of systematic missing values. Data were collected via hardcopy questionnaires in the month before the national election. Eight of the participants were members of a political party and eight were active for a party.

National elections took place on February 24 and 25, 2013. The serving prime minister was Mario Monti who had previously led a technocratic government to implement reforms and austerity measures. This a-political government ran the country for 18 months and Monti wanted to continue as prime minister and continue previous government policies. In the 2013 elections, a right-wing coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi and a left-wing coalition led by Pierluigi Bersani sought to lead a new government. Importantly, the Italian context featured a

newcomer party that criticized not just the previous government's policies, but also all governments of the last decades (i.e., the entire system of "old politics"). This Five Star Movement (*MoVimento Cinque Stelle*) led by comedian Beppe Grillo, refused public funding and, being ignored by principal broadcast news networks, its electoral campaign was mainly based on public meetings and web interactions, fiercely attacking the corruption and privileges of Italian political parties (e.g., Alberici & Milesi, 2012). It thus reflected a protest movement that turned into a political party for this national election. In an explorative way, the Italian context thus served as a litmus test of whether system-directed anger could motivate, rather than demotivate, voting intentions (i.e., Hypothesis 5).

Turnout would be 75% and election results would show that the center-left coalition won a very slight majority of votes (29.5% and 31.6% for the two chambers that the election pertained to), followed by the center-right coalition (29.1% and 30.7%), and by the Five Star Movement (25.5% and 23.8%). Monti's coalition obtained 10.5% and 9.1% of the votes. Thus, most votes (except the 10% for Monti) were actually votes for change. Moreover, for the first time in Italian history, a political party originated from a protest movement obtained almost one-third of the votes. However, because this party refused to cooperate with "old politics," coalition talks were difficult, culminating after the resignation of Bersani and the prosecution of Berlusconi in the formation of a new government led by the new leader of the left-wing coalition in April 2013.

2.4 | Measures

The Appendix includes all questionnaire items used to measure individuals' voting intentions,³ their party identification, party efficacy beliefs, anger about previous government policies, and anger about politics in general. As potential control variables, we measured age, gender, and political orientation, for which we used three different indices to avoid relying on one particular index.⁴ In the Supporting Information, we further report measures and analyses for a number of explorative

variables as well. All response scales were 7-point Likert-type scales (e.g., 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), unless indicated otherwise. Scale reliabilities can be found in the Appendix.

As our dependent variable, we chose a single-item measure of *voting intentions* because it simply and clearly reflects what it is supposed to measure. Because it was our key dependent variable, it was the first item measured in the questionnaire. Across samples, the distribution of scores on this item was skewed to the upper side of the scale. This means that actually less variance is available to be explained by the predictor variables and thus our tests can be considered quite conservative.⁵

The construct validity of our measures was, across the board, adequate. For *party identification*, we wanted to differentiate its measure from another identification measure included for exploratory reasons (voter identification; see Supporting Information). A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation performed within each sample consistently showed that the two types of identification could be empirically differentiated. In the Dutch sample, two factors materialized with eigenvalue >1, explaining 59.55% and an additional 15.85% of the variance. Factor loadings for voting identification were all higher than 0.59 and for party identification all higher than 0.84. In the Israeli sample, two factors materialized with eigenvalue >0.97, explaining 59.75% and an additional 12.18% of the variance. Factor loadings for voting identification were all higher than 0.39 and for party identification all higher than 0.72. In the Italian sample, two factors materialized with eigenvalue >1, explaining 43.80% and an additional 24.38% of the variance. Factor loadings for voting identification were all higher than 0.54 and for party identification all higher than 0.61.

For *party efficacy* beliefs, we wanted to differentiate its measure from potentially other efficacy measures, again for exploratory reasons (i.e., individual efficacy and participative efficacy beliefs in the context of social protest; Van Zomeren, Saguy, & Schellhaas, 2013). A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation performed within each sample showed, however, that the three efficacy measures could not be empirically differentiated in a consistent manner. For theoretical reasons, we decided to focus on party efficacy beliefs as the relevant measure in the analyses,⁶ while being mindful that participants did not empirically differentiate between these three efficacy measures.

We measured *anger about previous government policies* and *anger about politics in general* in order to differentiate between government- and system-directed anger. Because we developed and adapted these

³Most effects tested meta-analytically by Smets and Van Ham (2013) and Van Zomeren et al. (2008) mostly relied on intentions rather than actual behavior. Thus, the two phenomena can be best compared at the level of predicting voting intentions—which are, according to, for instance, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, an important indicator of motivation and a fair proxy of actual behavior. In line with this, the questionnaire also included three items tapping into how much *effort* individuals were willing to hypothetically invest in voting (e.g., how many minutes would you wait in line, how many miles would you drive), yet, across the board, results were not similar, confirming that the current research is about predicting intentions, not effort.

⁴The questionnaire also included exploratory variables such as opposition to previous government policies, trust in politics, and voter identification. Including those variables allowed us to explore the predictive power of perceptions underlying anger toward the government (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2004), trust in the political process and system (Smets & Van Ham, 2013), and an "active identity" (e.g., to be a voter is to vote; Bryan, Walton, Rogers, & Dweck, 2011). In the Supporting Information, we report findings for these variables. In the Israeli sample only, we also included anger about previous government *security* policies, but this did not predict voting intentions and thus was not analyzed further.

⁵Across all three samples, voting intentions reflected a skewed distribution of this variable toward ceiling, suggesting less variance to be predicted and thus conservative tests of our hypothesis. We thus decided to treat all variance on the voting intentions measure as theoretically meaningful rather than as empirical noise.

⁶Our focus on group efficacy beliefs also corresponds best with a collective action perspective on the internal efficacy dimensions used in the nonpsychological literature (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). Group efficacy is defined as the belief that the group is able to achieve its goals through joint effort (Bandura, 1997), which implies a stronger belief in internal efficacy, with the agent of that efficacy being the group, not the individual (see also Lee, 2006).

measures for this particular study, we explored through a principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation performed within each sample whether two factors would emerge. Results showed that the two anger measures could be empirically differentiated in each sample. In the Dutch sample, two factors materialized with eigenvalue >1 , explaining 71.29% and an additional 16.74% of the variance. Factor loadings for government-related anger were all higher than 0.79 and for politics-related anger all higher than 0.87. In the Israeli sample, two factors materialized with eigenvalue >1 , explaining 66.09 and an additional 21.76% of the variance. Factor loadings for government-related anger were all higher than 0.90 and for politics-related anger all higher than 0.72. In the Italian sample, two factors materialized with eigenvalue >1 , explaining 52.33% and an additional 27.70% of the variance. Factor loadings for government-related anger were all higher than 0.82 and for politics-related anger all higher than 0.71.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Preliminary analyses

There were clear differences between the samples on age, gender, and political orientation. Nevertheless, when we tested whether age, gender, and political orientation (we checked separately for each of its three indices) predicted voting intentions, results showed that this regression model was not significant in either country (the Netherlands, $F = 1.40$, $p = .23$; Israel, $F = 0.62$, $p = .69$; Italy, $F = 2.05$, $p = .07$), with none of the predictor estimates being statistically significant at $p < .05$. We therefore did not include these variables in further analyses.

There were also mean-level differences between the samples with respect to our key variables. Table 1 shows a general pattern indicating that, at the mean level, *party efficacy* was highest in Israel, followed by Italy, followed by the Netherlands. *Party identification* was also highest in Israel, followed ex aequo by Italy and the Netherlands. Notably, the Italian sample scored particularly high on *anger about politics in general*—which confirmed our expectation that the Italian context was one in which anger about politics in general seemed very relevant. Against this backdrop, we proceeded to test our hypotheses through multiple regression analyses.

3.2 | Hypothesis testing

Within each sample, we ran the same multivariate regression analysis in which voting intentions were regressed onto four predictors: party identification, party efficacy beliefs, anger about the previous government, and anger about politics. The correlation matrices on which these analyses are based can be found in Table 2. Results showed that these predictors jointly predicted voting intentions significantly in each sample, with adjusted explained variance ranging from 10% (the Netherlands) to 12% (Israel) to 18% (Italy), with F s of 5.53, 8.07, and 12.98, respectively (all corresponding $ps < .01$).

Testing Hypotheses 1 and 2, in the Dutch sample, voting intentions were predicted by party identification ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = .02$) and party efficacy ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = .04$). This pattern of results closely

replicated in the Israeli sample, for which voting intentions were predicted by party identification ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .01$) and party efficacy ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < .01$). Finally, in the Italian sample, party efficacy ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .01$) was a significant predictor while party identification was not (although trending in the expected direction; $\beta = 0.11$, $p = .09$). Thus, with only one exception, Hypotheses 1 and 2 received support across the three samples.

Testing Hypothesis 3, Dutch and Israeli individuals' anger about previous government policies did not significantly predict voting intentions ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = .11$; and $\beta = 0.03$, $p = .72$, respectively). Furthermore, Italian individuals' anger about previous government policies actually *decreased* intentions to vote ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < .01$). Neither of these findings supports Hypothesis 3, suggesting that anger about the previous government's policies does not appear to be a positive motivational force when it comes to voting in national elections.

Testing Hypotheses 4 and 5, Dutch individuals' anger about politics in general did not significantly decrease voting intentions (although trending in the predicted direction: $\beta = -0.17$, $p = .08$). The same pattern was observed (this time statistically significant) for Israeli individuals ($\beta = -0.16$, $p = .04$). Taken together, these findings lean toward supporting Hypothesis 4.

By contrast, the explorative litmus test of Hypothesis 5 was positive for the Italian context. In contrast to the findings for the other two contexts, Italian individuals' anger about politics in general *increased* voting intentions ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .01$). Thus, only in the Italian context did individuals' anger about politics in general uniquely motivate individuals to vote (whereas it demotivated it in the other two samples). Thus, across the board our findings supported four out of our five hypotheses, documenting largely context-independent effects for party identification and efficacy beliefs, and strong context-dependent effects for anger.

4 | DISCUSSION

Our findings support our proposal that anger is a curious, context-dependent case when it comes to motivating voting in national elections. Against the backdrop of relatively *context-independent* findings for party identification and party efficacy beliefs (which positively predicted voting intentions across the board, supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2), we found much more *context-dependent* findings for anger (supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5, but not Hypothesis 3). This pattern of results signals that positing a simple positive relationship between anger and voting intentions is unlikely to be realistic. Indeed, the more complex and important question here is *when* anger about which targets predict voting intentions. This seems to depend for a large extent on the availability of relevant outgroups in the election context, and thus on which targets for anger allow such a motivation to vote. This line of thought was exemplified by our Italian sample, in which anger toward politics in general motivated voting, whereas this anger demotivated voting in the Dutch and Israeli samples.

These context-dependent findings for anger should be interpreted against the backdrop of our relatively context-independent findings for

TABLE 2 Correlation matrices for key and control variables

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Intentions to vote	.28	.27	.05	−.09	−.11	−.17	−.12	−.04	.07
	.29	.29	.01	−.12	.02	.00	.04	.11	−.01
	.19	.28	−.22	.12	−.07	−.10	.06	−.11	.10
2. Party identification		.44	.01	−.05	−.05	−.18	−.01	.04	.02
		.40	.14	.10	−.02	−.04	−.10	.02	−.10
		.35	.11	.06	−.19	−.15	−.13	.03	.01
3. Party efficacy			.06	−.03	−.11	−.05	−.06	.01	.08
			.14	.01	.01	−.04	−.03	−.01	−.05
			.12	.03	−.22	−.17	−.12	.07	.13
4. Anger about previous government policies				.64	−.24	−.03	−.22	.15	−.05
				.48	−.41	−.26	−.30	.09	.10
				.26	−.05	−.07	−.20	.03	.10
5. Anger about politics					−.10	.01	−.19	−.08	.07
					−.18	−.11	−.09	.04	.18
					.00	−.02	.01	−.01	.11
6. Ideology: Left-right						.28	.73	−.04	−.13
						.30	.27	−.13	−.03
						.54	.64	−.14	−.05
7. Ideology: Progressive-conservative							.05	−.05	.03
							.19	−.02	−.10
							.34	−.10	−.03
8. Ideology: Social-liberal								.10	−.19
								.06	−.08
								−.08	.01
9. Age									−.33
									.01
									−.03
10. Gender									

Note. First row = Dutch sample, second row = Israeli sample, third row = Italian sample; correlations in bold are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

party identification and efficacy beliefs. Indeed, despite the many potential differences between the three election contexts, these findings supported Hypotheses 1 and 2, thus confirming our assumption that an ingroup is typically contextually available in contexts of national elections. Psychologically, the relevant ingroup identification and efficacy beliefs should therefore function similarly in national election contexts as they typically do in social protest contexts—a conclusion that seems in line with the findings of two different meta-analyses (Smets & Van Ham, 2013; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Extending this line of thought, our findings suggest that we can indeed view voting as a form of collective action where it involves individuals' an act on behalf of political parties to achieve their goals. As such, the collective action and voting literatures seem to have a common core, which warrants further theoretical and empirical exploration and integration (Van Zomeren, 2016).

Another important conclusion that we think we can draw from our findings is that anger does not necessarily, in and of itself, motivate voting in national elections. Compared to the ingroup-directed identification and efficacy predictors, the motivational potential of anger seems reliant on the contextual availability of a relevant outgroup as a

target of anger (Van Zomeren, 2016). Whereas this is often a given in social protest contexts (e.g., the government, authorities, or advantaged outgroup), this is certainly not guaranteed in national election contexts, and thus the motivational power of anger is also not a given. In fact, the only hypothesis that consistently did not receive support was our hypothesis about the motivational power of anger toward previous government's policies. This may have been the case because, across the samples, only those who clearly supported opposition parties may have felt such anger toward previous government policies. Furthermore, in the Italian sample we actually found that such anger demotivated individuals to vote, which we believe needs to be interpreted together with the finding that anger about politics in general motivated, rather than demotivated, voting. Indeed, if one feels anger about politics in general, then one presumably wants to vote for change of the system, rather than change *within* the system.

More generally, the Italian election context seemed most reflective of a social protest context. At the mean level, the Italian sample scored particularly high on anger about politics in general, and the regression model for this sample actually explained most variance in voting intentions. The positive litmus test of Hypothesis 5 contrasted with support

for Hypothesis 4, basically showing that anger about politics in general can motivate as well as demotivate voting. This strongly signals that anger about politics in general does not always seem to reflect political cynicism (e.g., Agger et al., 1961) and thus needs to be understood much better. Future research should therefore aim to identify the (structural and psychological) conditions under which anger motivates or demotivates voting in national elections. Understanding such conditions is also of major importance for the study of social protest, as this may help us better understand the difference between social protests aimed at changes within the system, or for change of the system itself (i.e., revolution).

Our findings may also have practical implications. For one, our findings suggest that those seeking to increase turnout in national elections should make use of party identification and efficacy in their electoral campaigns and political discourse and communication (e.g., Klandermans, 1997; Weber, 2013). It is less clear whether political communicators and campaigners should also make use of anger to this end, but at the very least they should be considering what the “right” target of anger would be in the given context. Although the best general strategy for mobilizing people for social protest may be to construct political messages and slogans that capitalize on all relevant motivations (Van Zomeren, 2016), our current findings suggest that one may need to be more careful with the use of anger as a mobilization tool, as this may not motivate, or even demotivate, voting in national elections.

As always, the findings should be carefully interpreted with study limitations in mind. For one, the study was not an experiment and thus our findings have low internal validity. Nevertheless, our aim was not to test our claims about causality, but to test the usefulness of applying what we know about what moves people to engage in social protest to predicting their voting intentions in national elections. We did so by using three quite different samples and social and political contexts, which means that our study had a relatively high external validity. Because we replicated meta-analytic conclusions from two different literatures (Smets & Van Ham, 2013; Van Zomeren et al., 2008), and given the large amount of variance to be expected between the different samples, at least this part of the findings seems quite robust. Future experiments can strengthen the interpretation of our findings in terms of causality, and offer additional tests of the hypotheses we tested and explored for anger.

Another limitation of our studies is that our samples were convenience samples and thus cannot be regarded as (nor were they intended to be) nationally representative samples. Because of the many and likely qualitative differences between the samples, we decided to conduct the very same analyses *within* samples, viewing converging support for our hypotheses as a strength (given the conservative test of our hypotheses that this reflects). The converging findings across the samples can thus again be regarded as relatively robust support for our hypotheses, and as a cushion of support for interpreting the context-dependent findings for anger.

Finally, our findings relied on data from countries that would hold national elections at the time of the study, employed a multiple-party political system that would likely result in coalition governments, have a record of relatively high voter turnout (e.g., López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002), and in which voting can be considered relatively effortless (as compared to, for instance, countries in which it is also

perceived as risky or even dangerous; e.g., Giguère & Lalonde, 2010). As such, our findings may not necessarily generalize to political contexts with only two main political parties (as in U.S. elections), with a record of relatively low turnout, or with features that make the act of voting a risky and even dangerous one. Future research may thus extend the current findings to contexts with such different features.

5 | CONCLUSION

In three different national election contexts held in 2012–2013 (in the Netherlands, Israel, and Italy), we tested the motivational power of ingroup identification, efficacy beliefs, and anger targeting previous government policies or politics in general. Our findings support the relevance of anger for voting in national elections, but suggest that anger is a rather curious, context-dependent case (particularly when compared with ingroup-directed party identification and efficacy beliefs). Specifically, we found that the latter were largely context-independent predictors of voting intentions across the three different samples. By contrast, anger about the previous government policies did not predict such intentions, whereas anger at politics in general demotivated voting intentions in the Israeli and Dutch samples, but motivated voting in the Italian sample. We believe this is because anger is heavily reliant on the contextual availability of a relevant outgroup that can serve as its target. Against the backdrop of recent emotional election campaigns and unexpected election results (e.g., Brexit, Trump), we hope that these findings provide food for thought and a clear pointer to the need for future theorizing and research about anger's potential to predict voting intentions in national elections.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors have no funding to report for this research.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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How to cite this article: van Zomeren M, Saguy T, Mazzoni D, Cicognani E. The curious, context-dependent case of anger: Explaining voting intentions in three different national elections. *J Appl Soc Psychol*. 2018;48:329–338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12514>

APPENDIX : ITEMS FOR KEY AND CONTROL MEASURES

Criterion variable: Voting intentions

1. I intend to vote on [date of national election]

Predictor variables:

2. *Party identification* ($\alpha_1 = .92$, $\alpha_2 = .91$, $\alpha_3 = .87$)

To what extent do you see the group of individuals who vote for the same party as you do as sharing many similarities?

To what extent do you identify with the group of individuals who vote for the same party as you do?

To what extent do you feel connected with the group of individuals who vote for the same party as you do?

To what extent are you proud of the group of individuals who vote for the same party as you do?

3. *Party efficacy* ($\alpha_1 = 0.94$, $\alpha_2 = 0.92$, $\alpha_3 = 0.90$)

I think that individuals who vote for the same party as I do, as a group, can influence new government policies

I think that individuals who vote for the same party as I do, together, can influence new government policies

I think that individuals who vote for the same party as I do can influence new government policies through their collective voice.

I think that individuals who vote for the same party as I do can achieve their collective goal to influence new government policies.

4. *Anger about previous government policies* ($\alpha_1 = 0.93$, $\alpha_2 = 0.97$, $\alpha_3 = 0.93$)

The policies of the previous government made me ... angry

... annoyed

... furious

... irritated

5. *Anger about politics* ($\alpha_1 = .95$, $\alpha_2 = .90$, $\alpha_3 = .84$)

When I think about politics in general, I feel ... angry

... annoyed

... furious

Control variables:

6. *Political ideology: Left-right*

How "leftish" or "rightish" would you vote?

7. *Political ideology: Progressive-conservative*

How "progressive" or "conservative" would you vote?

8. *Political ideology: Social-liberal*

How "social" or "liberal" would you vote?

9. *Age*

What is your age?

10. *Gender*

What is your gender?