War in Palestine and Third-Party Reactions in Germany

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Master Thesis – Applied Social Psychology

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27th of June, 2025
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Abstract

Since the 7th of October 2023, the war in Palestine has escalated, reaching polarised stances even in countries not directly involved in the war. Germany, a country that, due to its responsibility for the Holocaust, has a historically complex relationship with Israel, maintains support both through declaring solidarity and supplying weapons, leading to dissent by the public, which has engaged more frequently in collective action for Palestine.

This study investigates how the misalignment between individuals' views and the perceived governmental and societal stance in Germany on the Israel–Palestine conflict is associated with emotions and normative collective action intentions. Specifically, this research examines anger as a psychological mediator and includes collective Holocaust guilt as a potential moderator. To analyze these associations, a cross-sectional, online survey of 472 German participants assessed perceived misalignment with the government and society, anger toward both, collective Holocaust guilt, and intentions to engage in normative collective action.

Findings show that misalignment, both with government and society, is linked to anger and greater intention to engage in normative collective action. Anger toward the government fully mediated the relationship between governmental misalignment and normative collective action intentions. In the case of misalignment with society, this relationship was not mediated by anger directed at society. Additionally, collective Holocaust guilt did not moderate this effect, suggesting that historical guilt does not significantly inhibit political engagement in this context.

This study offers insights into the emotional underpinnings of political activism in democratic but constrained contexts. It suggests that perceived institutional misalignment is linked to anger and normative collective action intentions, independent of historical collective guilt.

Introduction

Activism often arises when individuals feel that their government or society does not reflect their values on societal issues (Falk, 2009). In Germany, this tension is particularly evident in the response to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. While the German government has maintained unwavering support for Israel—expressing solidarity, being the second largest arms supplier, and banning certain pro-Palestinian slogans and symbols—public opinion remains divided. Public responses have been polarized, with protests and divisions in response to these policies (Becker, 2025). Since October 7, 2023, pro-Palestinian demonstrations have increased (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2024), but have faced suppression from authorities. Protests, such as the one at Freie Universität Berlin, have been forcibly dissolved by police, raising concerns over freedom of expression and political repression (Becker, 2025).

When individuals perceive that their views are being ignored or actively silenced, they often experience anger, which can serve as a powerful motivator for collective action. Research on political mobilization suggests that anger arises when people feel their values are threatened or dismissed, increasing their likelihood of engaging in protests or other forms of activism (Borinca & Spears, 2025; van Zomeren, 2013). In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, Germans who oppose their government's stance may feel moral outrage, which could drive them to take action against policies they see as unjust. However, the extent to which anger translates into action may depend on historical narratives and collective guilt. Due to Germany's historical responsibility for the Holocaust, unconditional support for Israel is deeply embedded in national identity and political discourse (Rensmann, 2004). This creates a unique psychological conflict—while some individuals may feel compelled to protest perceived injustices, others may experience collective Holocaust guilt, which could suppress or complicate their willingness to engage in activism.

The present thesis aims to break these dynamics down into three key components. First, it examines whether misalignment between individuals' personal positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict and the perceived governmental or societal stance is associated with anger and normative collective action. Second, it investigates whether anger functions as a mediator between misalignment—both with the government and society—and normative collective action intentions. Third, it explores whether collective Holocaust guilt moderates this, potentially influencing the extent to which anger translates into political activism. By addressing these questions, this research offers important insights not only into political engagement within Germany but also into how historical narratives, collective guilt, and political repression shape dissent in the context of polarized conflicts.

Misalignment, Anger, and Collective Action

Misalignment occurs when an individual's stance on a societal issue conflicts with the dominant position of either the government or society. Such discrepancies can create psychological discomfort, particularly when the issue is perceived as highly moralized and politically charged (Skitka et al, 2005; Jost & Hunyady, 2002). To cope with this discomfort, individuals may either engage in normative collective action to challenge the dominant position or adopt system-justifying beliefs that help maintain the status quo despite personal disagreement.

In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, misalignment is particularly relevant in Germany, where the government's support for Israel and the suppression of pro-Palestinian activism contrast with the views of individuals advocating for Palestinian rights (Becker, 2025). The perception that the government or society disregards, opposes, or actively suppresses personal stances can evoke anger and increase support for normative collective action to challenge the dominant position.

When individuals experience misalignment between their own stance and that of the government, they may perceive their views as not only ignored but actively repressed. According to Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970), anger arises when individuals perceive a discrepancy between their expectations and the reality they face, particularly when this gap is seen as unjust. In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, individuals who support the Palestinian cause may expect their government to adopt a more balanced foreign policy. Instead, they are confronted with Germany's unwavering support for Israel, through both expressing solidarity and supplying arms as well as the imposition of restrictive protest laws, and increased bureaucracy of pro-Palestinian activism (Becker, 2025). This perceived political exclusion can intensify feelings of anger, particularly when government policies are seen as deliberately silencing dissent rather than fostering open dialogue and democratic engagement.

Anger, in turn, plays a central role in transforming perceived injustice into collective action. As an approach-oriented emotion, anger motivates individuals to confront and directly challenge the perceived sources of injustice (van Zomeren et al., 2012). Additionally, Political Opportunity Theory (Tarrow, 1998) suggests that repression does not necessarily discourage activism; instead, it can amplify it, particularly when state actions are perceived as signs of government overreach or vulnerability. In the German context, restrictions on pro-Palestinian symbols, slogans, and demonstrations reinforce the perception that dissent is being deliberately and forcefully suppressed. This perceived repression can create a heightened sense of urgency and moral obligation to act. Rather than deterring participation, these restrictions may strengthen individuals' resolve to oppose the government's stance, fueling increased protest activity, advocacy efforts, and broader political engagement.

Misalignment with society's stance stems from a different source of perceived injustice. While misalignment with the government is often experienced as institutional

oppression, misalignment with societal norms feels more personal, triggering feelings of social exclusion and moral outrage. According to Moral Conviction Theory (Skitka et al., 2005), individuals who view an issue as central to their moral beliefs are particularly likely to react strongly when those values are dismissed or contradicted by the people around them. In Germany, pro-Palestinian individuals may not only disagree with dominant societal attitudes but also perceive the mainstream as pro-Israel and as a profound moral failure—one that disregards Palestinian suffering and silences alternative perspectives. When people feel that their deeply held moral convictions are rejected or marginalized by society, this can evoke anger directed not only at institutions but also at the broader social environment. Such anger can still be understood within the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) framework as a group-based emotional response to perceived injustice. However, the target and perceived source of the misalignment may differ: whereas anger at the government may be driven by political betrayal or policy-based exclusion, anger at society may stem more from interpersonal experiences or identity-based value conflict. In this way, misalignment with societal norms, while potentially leading to similar emotional and behavioral outcomes as governmental misalignment, may reflect a different context or attribution of injustice.

Additionally, research on the SIMCA model (van Zomeren et al., 2012) suggests that when individuals strongly identify with a group and perceive it as the target of injustice, they may experience group-based anger, which increases their willingness to mobilize and protest. In Germany, where pro-Palestinian advocacy is often framed as extremist or antisemitic (Becker, 2024), individuals who identify with this cause and perceive such framing as unjust may respond by actively seeking to counter dominant narratives through public demonstrations, advocacy, and social movements.

Together, these insights suggest that misalignment—whether with the government or society—can serve as a powerful catalyst for both anger and normative collective action.

When individuals feel that their stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict is dismissed, restricted, or stigmatized, they are not only likely to experience anger but also a stronger motivation to challenge these dominant positions through activism. By examining how misalignment is linked to both anger and normative collective action, this thesis aims to provide insight into the psychological and political dynamics that shape third-party mobilization in polarized conflict settings.

The Mediating Role of Anger

Anger plays a central role in transforming misalignment into political action. While misalignment with governmental or societal positions can itself serve as a motivator for activism, anger acts as the emotional force that propels individuals from frustration to mobilization. Unlike emotions such as sadness or despair, which may lead to withdrawal, anger is approach-oriented, meaning it increases energy, motivation, and willingness to act (van Zomeren et al., 2008). When people experience anger over perceived injustice, they are more likely to engage in normative collective action to challenge the sources of that injustice (Borinca & Spears, 2025; van Zomeren, 2013).

Misalignment with the government's stance can elicit anger directed at state policies and authorities, particularly when individuals perceive a moral violation. Research on moral conviction (Skitka et al., 2005) suggests that when deeply held moral values are disregarded or contradicted, individuals experience moral outrage, which increases their likelihood of protesting. In Germany, those who oppose the government's unwavering support for Israel and restrictions on pro-Palestinian activism may see these policies as a fundamental dismissal of their moral stance. This perception of moral invalidation can evoke anger toward governmental institutions, increasing the likelihood of protests, demonstrations, or political advocacy aimed at changing state policy.

Similarly, anger can mediate the link between misalignment with societal norms and normative collective action against those norms. When individuals perceive a gap between their stance and the broader societal consensus, they may feel alienated or morally dismissed, leading to anger toward society itself. This form of group-based anger (van Zomeren et al., 2012) is particularly relevant in contexts where activists feel their ingroup is stigmatized. In Germany, pro-Palestinian activists may feel that public discourse frames their movement as illegitimate or extreme, further reinforcing anger toward mainstream societal attitudes. This anger, in turn, increases mobilization, as individuals seek to challenge dominant narratives, advocate for policy change, and build solidarity through collective action.

Given these dynamics, anger serves as one of the psychological bridges between misalignment and activism. Rather than frustration remaining passive, anger transforms discontent into engagement and resistance. Based on prior research, it is expected that anger toward the government will mediate the relationship between misalignment with governmental stances and the intention to engage in normative collective action against the government. Likewise, anger toward society is expected to mediate the relationship between misalignment with societal stances and normative collective action intentions aimed at shifting societal norms or public opinion.

The Moderating Role of Collective Holocaust Guilt

While anger is a key driver of normative collective action, another emotion that may influence political engagement is guilt (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2017). Unlike anger, which is approach-oriented and motivates individuals to challenge perceived injustice, guilt often leads to self-reflection and efforts to repair the harm (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). When guilt extends beyond the individual level, it can become collective, emerging when one's ingroup is perceived as historically responsible for harm. In Germany, where the

Holocaust remains a defining feature of national identity, collective Holocaust guilt continues to shape political attitudes, policy decisions, and public discourse (Rensmann, 2004).

Germany's historical responsibility for the Holocaust has played a fundamental role in its unwavering support for Israel, with diplomatic, financial, and military assistance framed as a moral obligation (Rensmann, 2004). This institutionalized commitment influences not only state policy but also media narratives and societal attitudes, creating strict boundaries around criticism of Israel (Thompson & Tuzcu, 2024). Pro-Palestinian activism in Germany is often met with accusations of antisemitism, and certain slogans such as "from the river to the sea" and demonstrations are criminalized, further reinforcing the idea that Germany's historical memory actively shapes the limits of political expression (Becker, 2025).

In this context, individuals who oppose the government's policies but also experience strong Holocaust guilt may struggle with cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, they may perceive Germany's unconditional support for Israel as inconsistent with broader principles of human rights and justice, leading to discomfort. On the other hand, Holocaust guilt may suppress their willingness to challenge the state's position, as doing so may feel morally questionable or politically risky. This tension could mean that individuals with high levels of Holocaust guilt are less likely to act on their anger, weakening the link between misalignment and normative collective action intentions.

Given these dynamics, collective Holocaust guilt is expected to moderate the indirect effect of misalignment on collective action intentions through anger. Specifically, it is hypothesized that higher levels of Holocaust guilt will weaken the link between anger and political action, reducing the likelihood that individuals who experience anger in response to misalignment will translate this emotion into activism. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of collective guilt are expected to act more decisively on their anger, increasing their engagement in protest and other forms of collective action. This moderating effect reflects the

psychological tension between historical responsibility and the motivation to challenge perceived injustice, providing important insight into how collective emotions shape political behaviour in the German context.

The German Context

Germany presents a unique sociopolitical environment for studying how misalignment with governmental and societal stances is associated with collective action. The intersections of historical memory, state policies, and public discourse profoundly shape how individuals engage with the Israel-Palestine conflict, making it a complex setting for political mobilization and dissent. In particular, Germany's historical responsibility related to the Holocaust continues to influence both government policy and public narratives, shaping sensitivities around criticism of Israel and expressions of solidarity with Palestine. Since October 7, 2023, pro-Palestinian collective action has intensified, particularly within universities and urban centres (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2024). While collective action can take many forms, research distinguishes between normative actions, such as protests, petitions, and boycotts, and non-normative actions involving more disruptive tactics (Tausch et al., 2011). In this research, both forms were measured; however, only the normative form of collective action intention was reported as explained below.

In Germany, university spaces have historically played a central role in political mobilization, and this remains evident in current pro-Palestinian activism. However, these demonstrations often face significant restrictions and legal barriers, with authorities criminalizing certain slogans and increasing police intervention in protests (Becker, 2025). Beyond legal repression, public discourse also constrains how dissent is expressed. Pro-Palestinian activism in Germany frequently exists within strict social and political boundaries, where expressions of solidarity with Palestine may be labelled as antisemitic or politically dangerous (Thompson & Tuzcu, 2024). These conditions create a climate in which

individuals who oppose the government's stance on Israel not only experience misalignment but also face the risk of political and social backlash, increasing emotional strain, and potentially fueling anger.

This context of political tension, legal constraints, and historical sensitivity provides a highly relevant backdrop for examining how misalignment with government and societal positions triggers anger and mobilizes collective action. Moreover, the role of collective Holocaust guilt may moderate these processes by reinforcing societal reluctance to criticize Israel, thereby intensifying the emotional experience of misalignment and constraining avenues for political expression. Understanding these dynamics within Germany offers broader insights into how historical narratives, state policies, and public sentiment interact to shape political activism and dissent.

The Present Research

This thesis investigates how misalignment with governmental and societal positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict contributes to normative collective action intentions in Germany. First, it examines whether misalignment is linked to individuals' willingness to engage in normative collective action intentions. Second, it explores whether this association is linked to anger, testing the hypothesis that anger serves as a psychological mechanism that transforms misalignment into political engagement. Finally, it examines whether collective Holocaust guilt moderates this process, specifically whether guilt is associated with anger mediating the link between misalignment and activism, thereby shaping the overall strength of the misalignment–normative collective action intentions relationship.

By addressing these questions, this research provides an analysis of how perceived political and social misalignment, emotional responses, and historical narratives interact to shape political engagement in Germany.

Direct Effects of Misalignment

H1a: Misalignment with governmental positions is expected to be associated with both anger toward the government and intentions to engage in normative collective action.

H1b: Misalignment with societal positions is expected to be associated with anger toward society and intentions to engage in normative collective action.

The Mediating Role of Anger

H2a: Anger toward the government is expected to mediate the association between misalignment with governmental positions and normative collective action intentions.

H2b: Anger toward society is expected to mediate the association between misalignment with societal positions and normative collective action intentions.

The Moderating Role of Collective Holocaust Guilt

H3a: Collective Holocaust guilt is expected to moderate the indirect association between misalignment with governmental positions and normative collective action intentions via anger, such that higher levels of guilt weaken the link between anger toward the government and normative collective action intentions.

H3b: Collective Holocaust guilt is expected to moderate the indirect association between misalignment with societal positions and normative collective action intentions via anger, such that higher levels of guilt weaken the link between anger toward society and normative collective action intentions.

Figure 1. *Visual representation of the research model*
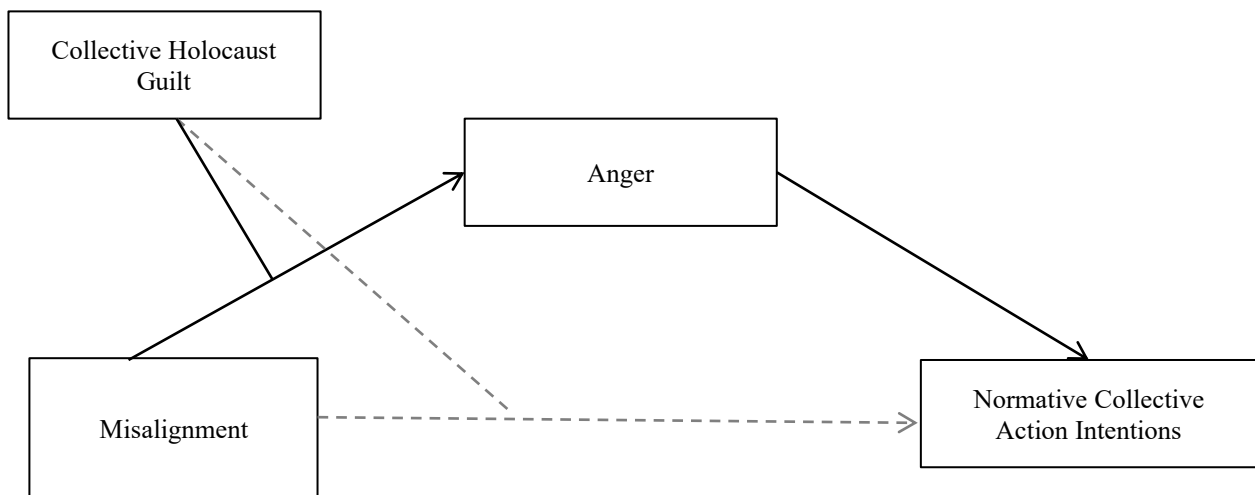
Methods

Participants

A priori power analysis using G*Power indicated that a minimum of 485 participants was required to detect a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.02$) with an alpha level of .05 and a desired power of .80. In total, 485 individuals accessed the survey, and 485 provided informed consent and began the questionnaire. Of these, no participants were excluded because they did not provide consent, one was excluded since they were reportedly underage, 12 were excluded for failing attention checks, and none were removed due to incomplete survey responses. This resulted in a final sample of 472 participants (166 female, 301 male, and 5 non-binary/third gender), aged between 18 and 74 years (M = 33.19, SD = 10.24). All participants were German nationals recruited via the online platform Prolific and received financial compensation for their participation.

Research Design and Procedure

This study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (EC-BSS). Participants were recruited via the online platform Prolific and were invited to complete a German-language online survey administered through Qualtrics (see Appendix A). Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The survey was expected to take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and participants were compensated for their time.

This was a cross-sectional study. Participants were first presented with an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. After providing consent, they completed demographic and background questions, including age, gender, nationality, and country of residence. Subsequently, participants responded to a series of questions assessing their political orientation and moral convictions regarding the war in Palestine.

The survey continued with questions about misalignment, where participants rated how much their personal views aligned with German government policies on Palestine and the dominant societal discourse on the issue. Afterwards, they indicated the extent of anger they felt toward the government and society due to their stance on the conflict, as well as their intentions to engage in normative collective actions. Finally, collective Holocaust guilt was assessed. A debriefing was provided at the end of the questionnaire, offering additional details about the purpose of the study and the contact information of the research supervisor in case participants had questions or experienced discomfort.

Measures

Independent Variables

        Misalignment. Misalignment was assessed by measuring individual, governmental, and perceived societal positions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, more specifically, all items assessed both personal opinion on Palestine specifically as well as the

perception of governmental perceptions in that matter. Misalignment scores were calculated by subtracting the mean governmental position score from the mean individual position score to obtain the governmental misalignment score and by subtracting the mean societal position score from the individual position score to obtain the societal misalignment score. The mean governmental misalignment score was $M = 1.50$, $SD = 1.35$. The mean of societal misalignment score was $M = 1.28$, $SD = 1.08$. Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Individual Position. Participants rated their stance using four items such as: "I believe the war in Palestine is an important issue" and "I support the Palestinian cause in the war" ($α = .86$, $M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.49$).

Governmental Position. Perceptions of the government's stance were assessed with four items, including: "I believe my government sees the war in Palestine as an important issue" and "I believe my government supports the Palestinian cause in the war" ($α = .81$, $M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.22$).

Societal Position. Perceptions of societal stance were assessed with four items such as: "I believe most people in my society see the war in Palestine as an important issue" and "I believe most people in my society support the Palestinian cause in the war" ($α = .85$, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.18$).

Mediating Variable

Anger. Anger was assessed using an ad hoc created scale consisting of two items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Participants rated their anger toward the government ("I feel angry when my government's stance on the war in Palestine differs from my own," $M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.77$) and their anger toward society ("I feel angry when the stance of most people in my society on the war in Palestine differs from my own," $M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.73$).

Moderating Variable

Collective Holocaust Guilt. Collective Holocaust guilt was assessed using the German version of the Collective Guilt Acceptance Scale (Branscombe et al., 2004). Participants rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) across five items. Example items include: "I feel regret about the harmful actions committed by Germans against Jews in the past" and "I feel guilty for the negative things my ancestors did to the Jews" ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.39$).

Outcome Variable

Normative Collective Action Intention. Normative collective action intentions were assessed using an ad hoc scale, inspired by Tausch et al. (2011). Participants rated their agreement with six items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Example items include: "I would sign online petitions supporting my stance on the war in Palestine" and "I would share information or opinions on social media about the war in Palestine" ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.68$).

Attention Check

An attention check was added to the questionnaire to assess participants' attention to the content: "This item serves only to identify participants who are not reading and responding to the survey carefully. Please do not respond to this item." (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Control Variables

Moral Conviction. Since moral conviction was already associated with Collective action, it was assessed using a scale adapted from van Zomeren (2018), tailored to the context of the Israel-Palestine war, in order to see whether it is associated with the model. Participants rated their agreement with three items on a 7-point Likert scale. Example items include: "My opinion about the war in Palestine is an important part of my moral norms and

values" and "My opinion about the war in Palestine is a universal moral value that should apply everywhere in the world" (α = .92, M = 3.77, SD = 1.76).

Political Ideology. Political ideology was measured using three items adapted from Borinca et al. (2022). Participants were presented with the statement: "Political opinions are often placed on a left-right scale, also known as a liberal-conservative scale in some countries like the US." They then indicated their position on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*liberal*) to 7 (*conservative*) for three items, including: "How would you rate your political views?" and "How would you rate your social views?" A composite score was calculated by averaging the three items (α = .85, *M* = 3.17, *SD* = 1.22).

Other Variables

Additionally, perceived misalignment with both society and the government, anger at the situation in general, and non-normative collective action intentions have been measured. However, these were not included in the further analysis since. The findings below are exemplary of these.

Results

Assumptions and Preliminary Analysis

Prior to conducting the main analyses, the assumptions of multiple linear regression were examined. Linearity was assessed via a scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values. The scatterplot suggested an approximately linear relationship, although some mild funnelling was observed, indicating slight heteroscedasticity. However, given that regression is generally robust to minor violations of homoscedasticity, the assumption was deemed sufficiently met. The normality of residuals was evaluated through a Normal P–P Plot and a histogram of standardized residuals. In the P–P Plot, the points closely followed the diagonal line, suggesting that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. The histogram further supported this conclusion, showing a roughly normal

distribution of residuals. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values. All tolerance values exceeded .40, and all VIF values were below 2.5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. The independence of errors was tested using the Durbin–Watson statistic, which was 1.886. Values close to 2 suggest no serious autocorrelation, thus supporting the assumption of independence.

Overall, the data were judged to meet the assumptions necessary for multiple linear regression analysis.

Correlations

Simple correlations between the key variables were computed (see Appendix B). Misalignment with the government was positively correlated with anger toward the government ($r = .39$, $p < .001$), as well as with normative collective action intentions ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher misalignment is associated with greater levels of anger and normative collective action intentions. Similarly, misalignment with society was positively correlated with anger toward society ($r = .25$, $p < .001$) and with normative collective action intentions ($r = .22$, $p < .001$).

Anger towards the government, as well as directed at society, was significantly and positively correlated with normative collective action intentions (see Table 1 for exact values), indicating that greater anger was consistently associated with stronger intentions to participate in collective action.

Collective holocaust guilt was positively correlated with normative collective action intentions ($r = .32$, $p < .001$), anger toward the government ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) and anger toward society ($r = .19$, $p < .001$).

Main Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypothesis, simple regression analyses were conducted to examine the role of misalignment with governmental or societal positions on anger and normative collective action intentions.

Misalignment with Government

Misalignment with the government was significantly related to normative collective action intentions ($B = 0.36$, $t(470) = 6.65$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.47], $R^2 = .09$). The overall model was significant. Furthermore, misalignment with the government was significantly related to anger toward the government ($B = 0.51$, $t(470) = 9.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.40, 0.62], $R^2 = .15$). These findings support Hypothesis 1a, indicating that greater misalignment with governmental positions was related to stronger normative collective action intentions and anger towards the government.

Misalignment with Society

A similar analysis indicated that misalignment with society's stance on the war in Palestine was significantly associated with normative collective action intentions ($B = 0.35$, $t(470) = 4.94$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.48], $R^2 = .05$). The model was significant. The analysis further showed that misalignment with society was also significantly related to anger toward society ($B = 0.39$, $t(470) = 5.50$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.54], $R^2 = .06$). Again, the model was significant. Together, these findings support Hypothesis 1b, suggesting that greater misalignment with societal positions is associated with stronger intentions to engage in normative collective action and increased anger toward society.

Mediation Analysis

To test Hypothesis 2a, a mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4), with misalignment with the government as the independent variable, anger toward the government as the mediator, and normative collective action

intentions as the dependent variable. Moral conviction and political ideology were included as covariates.

Governmental Misalignment Misalignment with the government was significantly associated with anger toward the government ($B = 0.33$, $t(468) = 6.64$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.43]). Anger toward the government, in turn, was significantly associated with normative collective action intentions ($B = 0.40$, $t(467) = 9.86$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.49]). The indirect effect of misalignment on normative collective action intentions through anger was statistically significant ($B = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.19]; completely standardized effect = 0.11). The direct effect of misalignment on normative collective action was not significant ($B = 0.05$, $t(467) = 1.09$, $p = .278$, 95% CI [–0.04, 0.14]), whereas the total effect was significant ($B = 0.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.28]). These results indicate that the relationship between discrepancy with governmental positions and normative collective action intentions was fully mediated by anger toward the government.

Societal Misalignment To test Hypothesis 2b, a mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4), with societal misalignment as the independent variable, anger toward society as the mediator, and normative collective action intentions as the dependent variable. Moral conviction and political ideology were included as covariates.

Misalignment with society was not significantly associated with anger toward society ($B = 0.12$, $t(468) = 1.90$, $p = .059$, 95% CI [–0.00, 0.25]). However, anger toward society was significantly associated with normative collective action intentions ($B = 0.37$, $t(467) = 9.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.29, 0.45]). The indirect effect of societal misalignment on normative collective action intentions through anger toward society was not statistically significant ($B = 0.05$, 95% CI [–0.01, 0.10]; completely standardized indirect effect = 0.03). The direct effect of misalignment with society on normative collective action intentions was also not

significant ($B = 0.02$, $t(467) = 0.27$, $p = .787$, 95% CI [–0.10, 0.13]), and the total effect was likewise non-significant ($B = 0.06$, $t(468) = 0.98$, $p = .326$, 95% CI [–0.06, 0.18]). Thus, the mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 2b) was not supported for misalignment with society.

Moderated Mediation Analyses

To test Hypothesis 3a, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 8, with governmental misalignment as the independent variable, anger toward the government as the mediator, collective guilt as the moderator, and normative collective action intentions as the dependent variable. Moral conviction and political orientation were included as covariates.

Governmental Misalignment The index of moderated mediation was not significant (index = 0.02, 95% CI [–0.003, 0.050]), indicating that collective guilt did not significantly moderate the mediating effect of anger toward the government. Although the interaction between misalignment with the government and collective guilt in predicting anger was marginally significant ($B = 0.06$, $t(466) = 1.75$, $p = .081$), this effect does not meet conventional significance thresholds and should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, misalignment with the government was also not significantly associated with anger toward the government, $B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(466) = 0.84$, $p = .404$, 95% CI [–0.16, 0.40]. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a was not supported.

Societal Misalignment The interaction between societal misalignment and collective guilt in predicting anger toward society was not significant, $B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(466) = 0.99$, $p = .322$, 95% CI [–0.04, 0.12]. Additionally, societal misalignment was not significantly associated with anger toward society, $B = –0.03$, $SE = 0.18$, $t(466) = –0.17$, $p = .864$, 95% CI [–0.39, 0.32].

The index of moderated mediation was not significant (index = 0.01, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [–0.02, 0.05]), indicating that collective guilt did not significantly moderate the indirect

effect of societal misalignment on normative collective action intentions through anger toward society. Thus, Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The present study aimed to examine how the misalignment between the individual's view and the perceived governmental or societal stance in Germany correlates with normative collective action intentions. Additionally, anger has been assessed as a mediator between such misalignments and collective action intentions. Lastly, collective Holocaust guilt has been hypothesized as a potential moderator of the mediation. Additionally, political ideology and moral conviction have been observed as covariates.

The main effects proposed in Hypothesis 1 state that: Misalignment between an individual's stance and the government's stance is expected to be associated with anger towards the government and support for collective action intentions directed against governmental policies. Additionally, misalignment between an individual's stance and the perceived societal stance was expected to be associated with normative collective action intentions as well as anger directed at society, both the misalignment between individual and government as well as the misalignment between individual and society have been found to significantly correlate to normative collective action intentions and anger levels either directed at the government or society. Therefore, hypothesis one is supported.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b suggest that anger, whether directed at the government or society, mediates the association between misalignment and normative collective action intentions. However, this was only confirmed for governmental misalignment and anger, not for the societal one. This suggests that anger only at the governmental level is associated with

collective action intentions in cases of governmental misalignment, suggesting a potential emotional pathway.

In contrast, no evidence was found to support Hypotheses 3a and 3b, which predicted that collective Holocaust guilt would moderate the link between misalignment between both societal and governmental and normative collective action intentions. The absence of this effect suggests that historical guilt, while still apparent in German political culture, may not significantly inhibit political expression in this context.

Implications

Taken together, these findings suggest that political and societal misalignment may be linked to emotional responses and a greater willingness to engage in collective action, even within a historically burdened third-party context. To better understand these dynamics, the findings are now interpreted through the lens of established theories on collective action and emotions, with a focus on how they support, extend, or challenge existing frameworks in the German context.

One key theory for collective action is the Moral Conviction Theory (Skitka et al., 2005), which argues that individuals react strongly when an issue is central to their moral beliefs and react particularly intensely when such beliefs are rejected by others. Germany's strong alignment with Israel, alongside the burdens of pro-Palestinian activism, should lead to a perceived rejection of core values. According to Moral Conviction Theory, these experiences should have triggered moral outrage, which in turn should have been associated with a greater willingness to engage in collective action. Since moral conviction is a well-known predictor for collective action, it was included as a covariate to test whether misalignment played a role under and above moral conviction (Skitka et al., 2005). Therefore, the findings of misalignment being associated with normative collective action intentions, at least on a governmental level, were independent of such, suggesting that

individuals protest when they do not align with institutions instead of when they are feeling disregarded in their morals. Misalignment, especially when linked to anger, could present a better link to normative collective action than moral conviction and move beyond the scope of what has been previously found.

Another key theory strongly aligned with this research is the framework of Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970), which states that individuals experience anger and are motivated to act when they believe their group is treated worse than a comparison group. They perceive a gap between what people like them receive and what others (or society at large) receive while interpreting this gap as unjust. In this study, participants who supported the Palestinian cause may have expected the German government to adopt a more balanced or humanitarian approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, they were instead confronted with state alignment with Israel and restrictions on pro-Palestinian activism. This mismatch is not about material benefits but could present a political misalignment different from material deprivation while still triggering anger through similar processes like misalignment, which was indeed associated with anger directed at the government, even after controlling for moral conviction. These findings are consistent with the idea that relative deprivation can produce anger even in contexts where repression can be perceived as institutionalized through legal constraints and dominant social narratives. While the present study does not test the broader applicability of Relative Deprivation Theory to democratic settings, findings align with the claims, that Relative Deprivation Theory is applicable not only in repressive contexts but also in democratic societies where repression can be perceived through embedded legal or discursive structures (van Zomeren et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2003).

However, anger as a mediator between misalignment and normative collective action intentions at the societal level has not been supported: While misalignment with societal

norms was associated with anger and normative collective action intentions, this anger did not transform societal misalignment into collective action intentions.

To explain this difference, it's important to note that anger tends to drive collective action, especially when directed at a clear target, and when people believe their actions can make a difference. Specifically, anger is more effective when aimed at those seen as responsible for injustice. The government is probably both more accountable and more specific as a target than society, making it more likely to transform anger into collective action (Leach et al., 2006). Another possible explanation for the difference in outcomes could be, that people might perceive a break in their democratic contract since people expect authorities and not broader society to represent them; when this contract is broken, anger could arise and feel effective due to the belief that authorities should represent the individual (Dalton, 2004). The misalignment with broader society lacks this contract; therefore, acting on that anger might feel less legitimate or useful.

Next to societal anger not mediating the link between societal misalignment and normative collective action intentions, collective holocaust guilt also did not moderate the mediation, either on a societal nor governmental level. It was assumed that individuals who misalign experience a unique psychological conflict, where collective Holocaust guilt possibly suppresses or complicates the willingness to engage in activism. Contrary to that, no effect of collective Holocaust guilt has been found. While guilt has been found to increase collective action in previous research, especially experienced on an ingroup level as an effort to repair harm and injustice for the benefit of the other group (Iyer et al., 2003; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2017; Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), collective Holocaust guilt did not show the same pattern. In this study, the guilt experienced due to the Holocaust is rather collective and historical instead of moral guilt over present-day harm. While these emotional experiences may feel similar, their behavioral implications could differ. Collective

guilt about historical crimes, such as the Holocaust, may be experienced more abstractly as well as diffused across generations. This diffusion of moral responsibility may explain why historically embedded guilt did not translate into present-day normative collective action in or against the support of Palestinians.

Overall, the findings offer important insights into how societal and governmental misalignment is affecting normative collective action intentions in a democratic context, which is shaped by social sensitivity and historical narratives. In Germany, where pro-Palestinian activism is treated critically by the state, misalignment was shown to be associated with increased anger and individuals' willingness to engage in normative collective action. This highlights that when people perceive their views as not only unheard but fundamentally at odds with their government or society, this may be associated with emotional responses that relate to a greater willingness to engage in action.

The key implication is that misalignment with both the government and society should not be underestimated as a factor associated with collective action intentions. Instead of staying silent when facing some form of misalignment, people are more politically active when they perceive that the government, as well as society, does not reflect their stance on the topic.

Additionally, anger toward the government being related to such misalignment is a crucial emotional mechanism which forms dissent into action. Contrary to that, anger toward society has not been found to have the same effect, suggesting a different route to collective action when misaligned with broader society. Lastly, the study also investigated the levels of historical guilt, which on an institutional level still affect policies, however, have not been found to be linked to individuals' willingness to act. This is practically relevant since it shows that those who intend to engage in collective action for Palestine do so independently of their

level of Holocaust guilt, meaning that their activism is not associated more or less with a rejection of historical responsibility.

Strengths of the Study

This study is supported by several methodological and contextual strengths that enhance both the reliability and the relevance of its findings. First, the sample size (N = 472) was large enough to detect even small or indirect effects. Therefore, results, both significant and insignificant, can be interpreted with confidence.

Second, the study benefits from strong contextual and ecological validity. The data collection was conducted early in April and therefore during a time when the war between Israel and Palestine, as well as collective action in various forms, were apparent. Capturing responses during this period makes findings more likely to reflect genuine emotions and intentions, rather than hypothetical or retrospective evaluations.

Furthermore, most collective action research is conducted with those directly involved and affected by what they advocate for themselves. This is not the case here, since this study examines why a historically burdened, but not directly involved, bystander engages in collective action during an external conflict.

Lastly, key control variables, such as moral conviction and political ideology, were included. The fact that these controls did not explain the effects observed reinforces the distinct contribution of misalignment in predicting collective action intentions.

Altogether, the study offers a timely and solid foundation for understanding how people engage politically when they do not feel represented, not as victims or perpetrators, but as bystanders in emotional, historical, and institutional settings.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations, which should be considered when interpreting the findings and designing future research. First, the study

employed a correlational design, which is insufficient for causal interpretations. While the model aligns with existing theory, it cannot confirm temporal or causal relationships. Future research could build on this, investigating causality rather than correlation.

While misalignment only accounts for the discrepancy between one´s stance and the perceived societal or governmental one, it could still be similar to the "us" vs "them" divide in social identity. When switching misalignment to social identity while keeping anger as a mediator and collective action as an outcome variable, the proposed model would be similar to some aspects of the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) (van Zomeren et al., 2012). Furthermore, common values and morals are important and correlated to group identification (Ellemers et al., 2002) and could be linked to social identity even while people do experience misalignment with their ingroup as well as alignment with the outgroup (Packer, 2008). Observing social identity to investigate possible differences, similarities and proportions of effects on collective action could therefore be an important step for future research.

Assessing Social identity would also be beneficial in the German context. While the study was conducted in Germany, it did not investigate levels of identification. This is especially important since the guilt pathway to collective action is mostly efficient when the individual feels guilt towards their own in-group (Iyer et al., 2003). Investigating this more through acquiring additional variables, such as levels of German identification or social identity in general, could be another direction for future research.

Furthermore, the study assessed normative collective action intentions rather than actual normative collective action, as the intention to act is often different from actually doing so. Observing actual normative collective action would be beneficial when translating findings into real-life applications (Rhodes et al., 2022).

Many of the topics in the study, including the stance on the war as well as collective Holocaust guilt, can be considered as moral and political topics and are prone to be influenced by social desirability bias, which might lead participants to answer what they think is socially accepted instead of their actual opinions, emotions or intentions (Grimm, 2010).

Lastly, this study focuses on misalignment. However, in the context of Germany, pro-Palestinian activism is often described as being repressed by institutions. As already stated in the Political Opportunity theory (Tarrow, 1998), repression has been found to increase collective action instead of lowering it. Including a measure that assesses repression, either perceived or actual, could be another valuable direction. This could further clarify whether misalignment alone or repression contributes to collective action and associated emotions.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates that individuals who perceive a misalignment between their values and those expressed by their government are more likely to report feeling anger towards that government, which in turn is associated with stronger intentions to engage in normative collective action, whereas misalignment with broader society does not seem to trigger the same emotional and behavioural response. Furthermore, collective Holocaust guilt did not influence the mediation. Even in a country like Germany, where historical guilt linked to the Holocaust is deeply embedded in the national identity and policies that support Israel, individuals intend to participate in normative collective action when they perceive misalignment with both society and the government. In today's sociopolitical climate, where discussions about Palestine are highly sensitive and often polarised, these findings highlight how such misalignments, even within a complex historical context, are linked to engagement despite social or political tensions.

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Appendix A

Scales from the Questionnaire

Political Orientation

Political opinions are often placed on a left-right scale, also known as a liberal-conservative scale in some countries like the US. Please indicate your general political opinions on a scale **from 1 (Liberal) to 7 (Conservative).**

1. How would you rate your political views?

2. How would you rate your social views?

3. How would you rate your economic views?

Note. Items are adapted from Borinca et al. (2022)

Moral Convictions

In this section, we are interested in your moral beliefs about the war in Palestine. Please read the statements below carefully and indicate your level of agreement on a scale from 1 to 7, **where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree.**

1. My opinion about the war in Palestine is an important part of my moral norms and values.

2. My opinion about the war in Palestine is a universal moral value that should apply everywhere in the world.

3. My opinion about the war in Palestine is a universal moral value that should apply at all times.

Note. Items are adapted from Van Zomeren (2018)

Positions on the War in Palestine

Personal. In this section, we are interested in your **personal stances** on the war in Palestine. Please read the statements below carefully and indicate your level of agreement on a scale **from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)**.

1. I believe the war in Palestine is an important issue.

2. I support the Palestinian cause in the war.

3. I believe the war in Palestine requires active attention.

4. I think it is important to take a clear stance on the war in Palestine.

Government. In this section, we are interested in your perception of your **government's stances** on the war in Palestine. Please indicate your level of agreement on a 7-point scale **from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)**.

1. I believe my government sees the war in Palestine as an important issue.

2. I believe my government supports the Palestinian cause in the war.

3. I believe my government thinks the war in Palestine requires active attention.

4. I believe my government finds it important to take a clear stance on the war in Palestine.

Public/Society. In this section, we are interested in your **perception of societies' stances** on the war in Palestine. Please indicate your level of agreement on a 7-point scale **from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)**.

1. I believe most people in my society see the war in Palestine as an important issue.

2. I believe most people in my society support the Palestinian cause in the war.

3. I believe most people in my society think the war in Palestine requires active attention.

4. I believe most people in my society find it important to take a clear stance on the war in Palestine.

Subjective Misalignment Measurement

Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement on a 7-point scale **from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)**.

1. My stance on the war in Palestine differs from my government's stance.

2. My stance on the war in Palestine differs from the stance of most people in my society.

3. I feel my government's position on the war in Palestine conflicts with my own.

4. I feel that the views of most people in my society on the war in Palestine do not align with my own.

Anger

In this section, we are interested in your anger levels regarding the war in Palestine. Please read the statements below carefully and indicate your level of anger on a 7-point scale **from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much)**.

1. I feel angry when my government's stance on the war in Palestine differs from my own.

2. I feel anger towards the current situation about the War in Palestine.

3. I feel angry when the stance of most people in my society on the war in Palestine differs from my own.

Collective Action

    Normative Collective Action. In this section, we are interested in your opinions on the statements below. Please indicate your level of agreement on a scale **from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)**.

1. I would sign online petitions supporting my stance on the war in Palestine.

2. I would share information or opinions on social media about the war in Palestine.

3. I would participate in online campaigns or discussions related to the war in Palestine.

4. I would participate in peaceful protests related to the war in Palestine.

5. I would donate to organizations supporting my stance on the war in Palestine.

6. I would attend community meetings or events related to the war in Palestine.

Non-Normative Collective Action. In this section, we are interested in your opinions on the statements below. Please indicate your level of agreement on a scale **from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)**.

1. I would share anonymous posts criticizing opposing stances on the war in Palestine.

2. I would participate in social media boycotts or unfollow campaigns related to the war in Palestine.

3. I would report a video or post content that opposes my stance on the war in Palestine.

4. I would participate in sit-ins in public spaces to protest the war in Palestine.

5. I would engage in symbolic acts like removing or defacing public symbols related to the conflict.

6. I would distribute flyers or posters without authorization to express my stance on the war in Palestine.

Note. Items for both collective action scales are inspired by Tausch et al. (2011)

Collective Guilt Acceptance Scale In this section, we are interested in your thoughts and feelings about the Holocaust. Please read each statement carefully and indicate your level of agreement on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

1. I feel regret about the harmful actions Germans committed against Jews in the past.

2. I feel guilty for the negative things my ancestors did to Jews.

3. I feel regret about some of the things Germans did to Jews in the past.

4. I believe I should help repair the harm Germans caused Jews.

5. I quickly feel guilty about the negative consequences Germans brought upon Jews.

Appendix B

Correlation Table

Participants completed several questionnaires measuring collective guilt, collective-action intentions, misalignment, and related variables. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all study variables.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Collective Guilt	4.16	1.39	—	.32**	-.08	-.01	.20**	-.30**	.18**	.19**
2. Normative Collective Action	3.00	1.68		—	.29**	.22**	.54**	-.26**	.62**	.58**
3. Misalignemnt Government	1.50	1.35			—	.51**	.27**	-.10*	.39**	.32**
4. Misalignment Society	1.28	1.08				—	.30**	-.17**	.29**	.25**
5. Moral Conviction	3.77	1.76					—	-.15**	.56**	.53**
6. Political Ideology	3.17	1.22						—	-.19**	-.21**
7. Anger Government	3.19	1.77							—	.82**
Anger Society	3.27	1.73								—

Note $N = 472$. **$p < .001$.