

Empowerment amidst turmoil: The impact of protest participation against the 2023 Israeli judicial reform on individual perceived threats and self-efficacy

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Abstract

Background: Protests serve as a powerful catalyst for transformations, where collective influence can lead to significant personal changes. Collective action can strengthen empowerment and collective self-efficacy in facing threats. This aligns with WHO's definition of health promotion as "enabling people to increase control over and improve their health". Collective action can act as a mechanism for promoting mental health and well-being by providing a sense of agency and belonging.

Objective: This research investigates the impact of protest participation on individual well-being in Israel during the 2023 judicial reform, focusing on self-efficacy and perceived threats.

Methods: Using a cross-sectional online survey with 570 participants, the study examines the psychological dimensions of civic engagement and activism.

Results: The study found that higher perceived threats significantly motivated individuals to participate in protests. Older age was associated with increased protest participation. Exposure to verbal violence in social media significantly increased protest. Participation in protests was found to enhance perceived self-efficacy, reinforcing the individual's belief in their ability to effect change. A higher rate of protest activity was found among individuals actively pursuing emigration, driven by intrinsic motivations and personal values. Contrary to initial expectations, participants who personally experienced verbal or police violence were less likely to cease participating in protests.

Conclusions: These findings underscore the importance of considering the psychological dimensions of civic engagement, particularly in socio-political crises. In conclusion, promoting activism and collective action can serve as a valuable public health strategy to enhance mental health and resilience, supporting individuals and communities in navigating challenging times.

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Original Manuscript

Original Paper

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Keywords: Protest participation; self-efficacy; perceived threats; empowerment; mental health; Israel 2023 judicial reform; civic engagement; activism; social cohesion; public health promotion.

Introduction

In 2023, Israel experienced significant political protests against the government's proposed changes to the judicial system. These protests, which saw participation from tens to hundreds of thousands of Israelis, were primarily in response to plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government to overhaul the judiciary. The government's proposal aimed to limit the power of the Supreme Court and of the government's legal counselors, as well as to grant the governing coalition a majority on the committee that appoints judges [1, 2]. Throughout the year, the protests witnessed a surge in participation, with events in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other cities drawing large crowds

(Figure 1 & Figure 2) [3].

Figure 1. Israeli anti-judicial reform protestors in Kaplan, Tel-Aviv (Photo by Ohad Peri).

Figure 2. Israeli anti-judicial reform protestors in Kaplan, Tel-Aviv (Photo by Ohad Peri).

The demonstrations were marked by calls for the protection of democracy in Israel and concerns over the potential impact on minority rights and the broader political landscape of the country. These protests represented one of the biggest domestic crises in Israel's recent history, reflecting deep divisions within Israeli society and raising questions about the future direction of the country's democratic institutions and governance [2].

The phenomenon of collective action, particularly in the form of protests, has long stood as a powerful catalyst for driving social and political transformations. Protests harness the ability to mobilize individuals, resonate with a wide audience, and disrupt established norms, thereby serving as significant agents of change [4]. Research prominently highlights the efficacy of nonviolent protests, pointing out that when 3.5% of a population engages in sustained, collective action, the potential to instigate meaningful change is significant [4].

Most of the existing scientific research has focused on the social, psychological and political aspects of protests and collective action [5]. In the present study, we examine these phenomena from a different perspective by investigating how individuals respond to threats and how threats impact self-efficacy. According to the World Health Organization's definition of health, achieving good health requires coping with threats [6]. Additionally, judicial reform can have significant influences on mental and physical health. This establishes a crucial foundation for examining the psychological dimensions of participation in collective action, particularly concerning individual perceived threats and self-efficacy.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health broadly as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” [7]. This definition underscores the multifaceted nature of individual well-being. A recent systematic review examined psychosocial predictors and outcomes of participation in social movements and collective actions like demonstrations and protests. The review identified key factors like collective identity, efficacy, deprivation, morality, and system beliefs as explaining protest involvement. It also found participation associated with both enhanced well-being through empowerment and risks like distress [5]. The impact of protests on individual well-being aligns with this holistic view of health, as research has found a diverse array of findings that underscore both the potential benefits and risks. [Hamama-Raz, Leshem \[8\]](#) found that higher engagement in social unrest in Israel was associated with increased anxiety and distress but decreased state hope, highlighting significant mental health concerns that accompany such engagement. On one hand, the act of participating in a protest can foster a sense of solidarity, belonging, and shared purpose, potentially leading to enhanced well-being and mental health outcomes. For instance, [Lyons \[9\]](#) found a connection between reduced depressive illness and aggression in the context of Belfast, suggesting that collective action might serve as a cathartic experience, allowing individuals to collectively express grievances and find solace in shared goals and community. [Curran \[10\]](#) also emphasizes the potential for collective actions to serve as a cathartic experience, particularly in the context of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland, highlighting how the act of coming together can foster resilience and strength in the face of adversity. Moreover, greater social cohesion among subpopulations, either supporting or opposing the cause of the collective action, could strengthen social ties, potentially buffering the adverse impact of stressful environments [11, 12]. This notion aligns with the findings of [Ni, Kim \[13\]](#), who

underscore the potential for collective action to reduce depression and suicides, further emphasizing the importance of community and shared experience in mitigating the effects of mental health stressors. A recent meta-analytic review explored the concept of collective effervescence and its associations with psychosocial outcomes during collective gatherings and demonstrations. This work identified collective effervescence as intense shared emotional activation generating effects like enhanced emotions, social integration, values/beliefs, and empowerment [14].

Protest participation as a form of civic engagement can also be understood within the framework of public health promotion. Activism and involvement in collective action can be seen as mechanisms for promoting mental health and well-being. Health promotion is defined as “the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health” [6]. This definition is highly relevant to civic engagement as it emphasizes empowering individuals and communities to take active control of their health outcomes. Engaging in protests provides individuals with a sense of agency and control, which are crucial components of psychological resilience. The sense of belonging to a cause and the social support derived from being part of a collective movement can act as buffers against stress and anxiety, potentially mitigating the adverse effects of socio-political crises [11]. From a public health perspective, promoting civic engagement and facilitating opportunities for collective action can be integral to community well-being. The sense of empowerment and community solidarity fostered through protest activities can enhance social cohesion and support networks, which are essential for mental health [15]. By addressing the psychological and social needs of individuals through collective action, public health initiatives can leverage activism as a tool for improving mental health outcomes and building resilient communities. This holistic approach aligns with the principles of health promotion, emphasizing the importance of social determinants of health and the role of community engagement in achieving well-being [16].

On the other hand, the relationship between protest participation and well-being is not universally positive. The unpredictable and tumultuous nature of protests can expose participants to physical danger, legal repercussions, and emotional distress, as documented by [Galovski, Peterson \[17\]](#) in their examination of the mental health effects for both law enforcement and community members during the Ferguson protests. Their findings highlight the inherent risks associated with exposure to violence during collective actions, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of how engagement in protests correlates with individual psychological outcomes. [Levi-Belz, Groweiss \[18\]](#) documented elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms associated with protest participation in Israel’s civil protest against the government’s judicial reform, emphasizing the potential for psychological toll, even in the absence of physical violence, illustrating the varied and context-dependent nature of these impacts. Additionally, the ambiguous outcomes of protests can lead to a sense of uncertainty and disillusionment, particularly if the movement does not achieve its immediate goals, potentially leading to stress and a sense of powerlessness.

Ni, et al. [13] systematically review the mental health impacts of protests, riots, and revolutions, offering a comprehensive overview of the potential for both adverse and positive mental health outcomes. [Pirralha \[19\]](#) explores the causal links between political participation and well-being in the Netherlands, providing a broader context for understanding the relationship between collective action and individual health. However, the focus on conventional forms of political participation leaves room for further exploration of the psychological impacts of more direct and confrontational forms of collective action, such as protests.

[AboJabel and Ayalon \[20\]](#) investigated the reasons behind the non-participation of older Israeli Arabs in the protests against the government’s judicial reform, identifying factors such as perceived discrimination, internal Jewish conflict, and poor health. This study highlights the socio-political barriers that prevent minority groups from engaging in civic activism. In light of that, it can be argued, that the relationship between protest participation and individual well-being is intricate and

nuanced, necessitating careful examination and consideration of the diverse range of experiences and outcomes associated with collective action. The existing literature presents a tapestry of findings, highlighting the potential for both positive and negative impacts on mental health, and emphasizing the need for ongoing research to fully understand and support the well-being of those who engage in collective action.

Central to this discourse is the concept of self-efficacy, as defined by [Bandura \[21\]](#), which refers to an individual's belief in their capability to influence events that significantly impact their lives. This belief system plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals approach goals, tasks, and challenges. In the context of protests, understanding self-efficacy becomes paramount as it directly influences participants' psychological experiences and outcomes. [Drury and Reicher \[22\]](#) provide valuable insights into this domain, suggesting that participation in collective action has the potential to enhance individual self-efficacy, fostering a sense of empowerment and agency.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of participation in protest activities on individual well-being in the 2023 Israeli judicial reform protests context, focusing on the interrelation between perceived threats and self-efficacy. This study seeks to elucidate the relationship among personal empowerment, perceived threats, civic participation, and their collective influence on well-being. By framing activism and civic engagement within the context of public health promotion, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of civic engagement in politically active environments. The findings may also provide insight into how collective action can serve as a mechanism for promoting mental health and resilience, aligning with the principles of health promotion and emphasizing the importance of social determinants of health and community engagement in achieving overall well-being.

Methods

Research Design and Procedure

A cross-sectional study that used an online questionnaire. The questionnaire includes three parts: sociodemographic questions, queries about the political protest in Israel, and questions regarding self-efficacy and perceived threats.

To ensure the content validity of our questionnaire, we conducted a pilot study with 20 participants. This pilot study served as a crucial step in evaluating the questionnaire's ability to accurately capture the intended information. By administering the questionnaire to a small group, we were able to gather insights into the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the questions. Feedback from these participants was instrumental in refining the questionnaire, thereby enhancing its validity in terms of content coverage and appropriateness for the larger study. This process helped in ensuring that the questionnaire effectively addressed the key aspects of the research topic.

Hypotheses

This study aims to test a series of hypotheses related to the motivations and behaviors of individuals participating in anti-judicial change protests in Israel, including the impact of contemplating emigration, age, personal experiences of violence, perceived self-efficacy, and gender differences on protest participation and self-efficacy. Specifically, the hypotheses explore whether contemplating emigration affects protest participation, whether younger individuals are more active in seeking to leave the country, the effect of personal violence experiences on protest dropout rates, the relationship between protest involvement and self-efficacy, the influence of perceived threat on

participation, and the impact of age and gender on self-efficacy and protest activity.

Hypothesis 1: Contemplating emigration from Israel will not necessarily decrease the level of participation in anti-judicial change protests.

Hypothesis 2: Younger individuals will report being more actively engaged in practical actions to leave the country.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who have directly experienced violence themselves will have the lowest dropout rate from continuing to participate in anti-judicial change protests.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals who are more frequently involved in anti-judicial change protests will report higher self-efficacy than those who are less active.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals with a greater perceived threat will participate more in anti-judicial change protests.

Hypothesis 6: Men will report higher perceived self-efficacy than women.

Hypothesis 7: As age increases, perceived self-efficacy and reported participation in anti-judicial change protests will also increase.

Hypothesis 8: Individuals who have experienced verbal violence will participate more in anti-judicial change protests.

Sampling and Data Collection

An online survey designed and distributed by Qualtrics XM enabled rapid and effective distribution. The pilot was carried out on September 4-5, 2023. The survey was distributed to the public on September 7, 2023 - October 4, 2023. Questionnaire distribution to the public preceded the war in Israel, while the protests were in progress, reaching a total of 570 participants. Researchers circulated the questionnaires across social networks like WhatsApp and Facebook using snowball sampling. The questionnaire was distributed to diverse groups and forums and not only to dedicated groups related to the protest in Israel. We also tried to reach both supporters and opponents of the judicial change in order to maximize participation. However, in the data analysis process, we only considered respondents who opposed the legal reform. For this study, our inclusion criteria were specific: participants needed to be men and women over the age of 18, Hebrew speakers, capable of giving informed consent to participate in the study, and those who oppose the judicial change in Israel. Conversely, the exclusion criteria were set to disqualify men and women under the age of 18, non-Hebrew speakers, individuals unable to give informed consent, and those who support judicial change in Israel. By limiting data analysis exclusively to respondents opposed to the proposed legal reform, we were able to directly explore perspectives on the judicial change issue, thereby meeting our research objectives. This careful selection of participants ensured that the study's findings would be relevant and reflective of the targeted demographic's perspectives regarding judicial change in Israel (Table 1). Our approach first aimed to maximize recruitment participation to gather wide-ranging responses. However, the analytical focus was then narrowed to exclusively examine responses from those against judicial change.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (N=570)

Characteristics		n (%)
Gender	Male	157 (27.5)

	Female	411 (72.1)
	No response	2 (0.4)
Age (Years)	18-29	18 (3.2)
	30-39	37 (6.5)
	40-49	134 (23.5)
	50-59	173 (30.4)
	60-69	117 (20.5)
	70-79	75 (13.2)
	80+	16 (2.8)
Religion	Secular	500 (87.7)
	Traditional - not religious	42 (7.4)
	Traditional- religious	9 (1.6)
	Religious	2 (0.4)
	Other	17 (3.0)
Education	Secondary education without full matriculation	23 (4.0)
	Secondary education with full matriculation	31 (5.4)
	Diploma	37 (6.5)
	BA	165 (28.9)
	MA	229 (40.2)
	PhD	75 (13.2)
	Other	10 (1.8)
Marital Status	Married	400 (70.2)
	In a relationship	57 (10.0)
	Divorcee	54 (9.5)
	Widower	30 (5.3)
	Bachelor	29 (5.1)
Parent	Yes	519 (91.1)
	No	51 (8.9)

Research Tools

The questionnaire consisted of four parts. In the first part, participants were asked about background characteristics, which included age (18 years or above), area of residence in Israel, marital status, whether the participant has children, gender, education level, ethnicity (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze, Circassian, or other), religiosity (Ultra-Orthodox, religious, traditional religious, traditional non-religious, and secular), and occupation (open-response question). Additionally, political identification was also collected (right, moderate right, center, moderate left, and left).

The second part of the questionnaire focused on judicial change in Israel, beginning with a screening question: 'Do you support or oppose the process of constitutional change?'. Participants supporting the judicial change process received five questions. These questions included: 'Do you express yourself on social media in favor of the judicial change?' measured by checking the frequency of expression, ranging from almost every day to just a few times. Another question refers to encounters with verbal violence on social media towards statements supporting the judicial change, measured through personal experience or witnessing violence towards others. Participants were also asked, 'Do you think it is justified to call people who volunteer for the military reservists and want to quit "refusers"?'. This question is measured on a scale of five levels. Additionally, participants are queried about their involvement in protests supporting the judicial change by participating in protests. Those

who answer 'no' to this question are further asked about their reasons for not participating in the protests. Subsequently, they are directed to the end of the survey and do not proceed to the third part of the questionnaire.

It is important to note that this study examined exclusively the responses of individuals who indicated opposition to the judicial change process in the screening question. Those expressing opposition were directed to part B of the second part of the questionnaire. There, they were queried about their stance on the protest against judicial change. Participants were asked whether they had participated in the protests since their inception and, if so, in what way—whether through actively demonstrating, writing position papers, donating money to protest groups or other activities. Using these two questions, a variable of activity in participating in a protest was determined, where active participants are those who reported participating in a protest at least once a week in more than 3 forms of protest actions.

Subsequently, participants were asked about the frequency of their engagement in protest-related activities against judicial change and their current extent of participation in demonstrations. Both questions gauged frequency on a scale ranging from almost every day to not at all. Using this question, the variable "level of participation in the protests" was constructed so that 1= does not take part in the protest at all, 2 = participates in activities less than once a week, 3 = participates in activities once a week, 4 = participates in activities more than once a week.

Following this, participants were questioned about two forms of violence: verbal violence on social media directed towards statements opposing judicial change and police violence at protests. They were then asked if they had ceased participation in demonstrations in recent months and, if so, they were asked to provide reasons for their cessation.

The third part of the questionnaire comprised 12 items; self-efficacy (items 1-6) and perceived threats (items 7-12), with the focus shifted from a health threat to a political threat (Table 2).

Table 2. Self-efficacy and perceived threats items

Stopping the judicial change will prevent its negative consequences	.1
Participation in the protest helps to prevent judicial change	.2
If people participate in the protest, there is a lower likelihood of the legislation continuing	.3
I believe my participation in the protests will help prevent the continuation of the legislation	.4
I believe that my participation in the protests is an action that does not require much effort from me	.5
I can participate in the protest, and this will contribute to preventing the continuation of the legislation	.6
I believe that the judicial change is a serious threat to everyone	.7
I believe that the judicial change is harmful to the country	.8
I believe that the judicial change will have serious consequences for the physical and mental well-being of the citizens	.9
I may be at risk because of the judicial change	.10
There are high chance that I will be hurt because of the judicial change	.11
I am already hurt by the judicial change	.12

The fourth and last part of the questionnaire addressed the possibility of leaving the country following the judicial change. The participants were asked whether they considered leaving the

country in response to the judicial change. If so, they are asked to detail their actions, such as thoughts about leaving, obtaining a foreign passport, checking job opportunities abroad, transferring money from the country, etc. From these two questions, a variable "emigration intentions" was developed, categorizing the responses into 1 = never thought or I thought regardless of the constitutional change, 2 = I thought or debated whether to leave but only as thoughts, 3 = I thought or debated whether to leave and took practical actions.

Analysis

To test hypothesis 1, a chi-square test (N=570) was performed to test the relationship between emigration intentions (never, thoughts only, thoughts and practical actions) and activeness in protest participation (active, non-active).

To test hypothesis 2, a chi-square test for independence (N=570) was performed to test the differences between age groups (18-39, 40-59, 60+) and reported practical actions taken to emigrate.

To test hypothesis 3, a Chi-square test was performed to test the relationship between experiencing violence or witnessing violence and ceasing participation in the protests, once for verbal violence and once for police violence.

To test hypothesis 4-8, a Structural Equation Modelling was performed to examine the relationship between the independent variable - perceived threat and the dependent variable - perceived self-efficacy. The mediator is the frequency of participation in protests. In addition, additional independent variables were also examined within the model: exposure to verbal violence, age, and gender.

Ethics

This study was approved by the Faculty of Social Welfare and Health Sciences Ethics Committee for research with human subjects at the University of Haifa (approval no. 440/23).

All the study participants gave their written informed consent to participate in the research and to publish its findings. The research does not provide any medical or personal information by which each participant can be identified, thus anonymity is ensured.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Contemplating Emigration from Israel Will Not Necessarily Decrease the Level of Participation in Anti-Judicial Change Protests.

To this hypothesis, emigration intentions were categorized into three levels: never, thoughts only, and practical actions. Protest participation was also defined as 'Active' (n=220) or 'Non-active' (n=350), as defined in Hypothesis 2. The results (Table 3) suggest that there is a higher rate of activity in the protest among those who are already taking practical actions to leave the country [$\chi^2(2)=6.37$, $P=0.0414$]. The largest proportion of active participation in protests was found among those who made practical emigration actions (45.1%), compared to those thinking about it but taking no action or those who never thought (31.7% and 36.7%, respectively).

Table 3. Participation in anti-judicial change protests level by contemplated emigration (N=570)

Participation in anti-judicial change protests	Contemplating emigration						Total	
	Never		Thoughts only		Practical actions			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Active	90	36.7	39	31.7	91	45.1	220	38.6
Non-active	155	63.3	84	68.3	111	55.0	350	61.4
Total	245	100.0	123	100.0	202	100.0	570	100.0
Significance (χ^2 test)	$\chi^2(2)=6.37, P=0.0414$							

Hypothesis 2: Younger Individuals Will Report Being More Actively Engaged in Practical Actions to Leave the Country.

The chi-square test for independence was used to test the differences between age groups and reported practical actions taken to emigrate. The age variable was categorized into three groups: young (18-39, n=55), middle-aged (40-59, n=307), and older (60+, n=208). The differences were statistically significant [$\chi^2(2)=28.89, P<0.0001$], and showed that those in the young age group reported the highest proportion (51%) taking practical actions, followed by Middle-aged (42%) and Older (22%). The results supported the hypothesis, with younger respondents demonstrating significantly greater reported engagement in practical emigration actions compared to older age groups.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals Who Have Directly Experienced Violence Themselves Will Have the Lowest Dropout Rate From Continuing to Participate in Anti-Judicial Change Protests.

For verbal violence, a significant association was found [$\chi^2(2)=7.45, p=0.0241$]. Those who witnessed verbal violence against others (n=282) reported the highest proportion of stopping participation in protests (20.9%), followed by those who never experienced verbal violence (16.3%). Participants who personally experienced verbal violence (n=85) reported the lowest proportion of stopping participation in protests (8.2%).

Similarly, for police violence, a significant difference was found [$\chi^2(2)=6.93, p=0.0313$]. Participants who personally experienced police violence (n=56) reported the lowest proportion of stopping protests (5.4%), while participants who never experienced police violence (n=350) reported the highest proportion of stopping protests (19.7%).

While statistical significance was detected, the direction of the associations did not support the hypothesis. Individuals with direct personal experience of violence seemed least likely (rather than most likely, as hypothesized) to cease participating in protests (Table 4).

Table 4. Stopping participation in anti-judicial change protests by experiencing verbal and police violence (N=570)

Experiencing	Total	Stopping	Significance
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Violence			protesting		$(\chi^2 \text{ test})$
			n	%	
Verbal Violence	Myself	85	7	8.2	$\chi^2(2)=7.45, P=0.0241$
	Others	282	59	20.9	
	None	123	20	16.3	
Police Violence	Myself	56	3	5.4	$\chi^2(2)=6.93, P=0.0313$
	Others	84	14	16.7	
	None	350	69	19.7	

Hypothesis 4-8: The results of a mediation analysis show the direct and indirect effects of perceived threat, age, gender (male), and verbal violence on perceived self-efficacy, mediated through participation in protests.

Direct effects were found (Figure 3): Higher perceived threat (standardized coefficient=0.24, 95% CI=0.17-0.32), older age (standardized coefficient=0.21, 95% CI=0.13-0.29), and higher participation in protests (standardized coefficient=0.24, 95% CI=0.16-0.32) were found to increase perceived self-efficacy. Additionally, it was found that gender affects self-efficacy, with men reporting higher levels than women (standardized coefficient=0.11, 95% CI=0.04-0.19). It was also found that the factors that raise the level of participation in protests include higher perceived threat (standardized coefficient=0.21, 95% CI=0.13-0.29), older age (standardized coefficient=0.26, 95% CI=0.18-0.34), and exposure to verbal violence (standardized coefficient=0.27, 95% CI=0.19-0.35).

Figure 3. Structural Equation Modelling

The indirect effects show that age (standardized coefficient=0.06, 95% CI=0.03-0.09), perceived threat (standardized coefficient=0.05, 95% CI=0.03-0.08), and verbal violence (standardized coefficient=0.07, 95% CI=0.04-0.09) have significant positive indirect effects on self-efficacy perception, mediated through the level of participation in protests. Specifically, older age, higher threat, and exposure to verbal violence led to greater participation, which in turn increased perceived self-efficacy.

Discussion

Principal Results

The results of this study revealed several significant findings regarding the impact of participation in protests on individual well-being, focusing on perceived threats, age, verbal violence, self-efficacy, and practical actions related to emigration. One of the primary findings was that higher perceived threat was associated with increased participation in protests (standardized coefficient=0.21, 95% CI=0.13-0.29). This finding aligns with the Health Belief Model [23], which posits that perceived threats significantly motivate behavior change. Participants likely perceived a high level of threat to democratic values, driving them to protest actively. This urgency or danger they felt may have heightened their motivation to engage, emphasizing the role of perceived threat as a catalyst for civic action. This aligns with the engagement theory and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, suggesting that active involvement in challenging tasks strengthens an individual's belief in their capabilities [21]. Relative Deprivation Theory provides another explanatory framework. It suggests collective action results from feeling deprived relative to some standard or others, as perceived threats to rights, opportunities, or status can breed deprivation and participation [24]. Additionally, the meta-analysis by Agostini and van Zomeren (2021) found a correlation between moral conviction or obligation and participation in protests [25].

Additionally, the study found that older age was significantly associated with higher protest participation (standardized coefficient=0.26, 95% CI=0.18-0.34). This can be attributed to the broader life experience and deeper understanding of the implications of political changes among older individuals. Their historical perspective and awareness of potential risks likely enhance their motivation to engage in activism. This is consistent with findings that life experience and historical awareness play critical roles in shaping political activism [20].

Another significant finding was that exposure to verbal violence in social media was also significantly associated with higher protest participation (standardized coefficient=0.27, 95% CI=0.19-0.35). Participants who encountered verbal violence, particularly online, may have felt a heightened sense of urgency and solidarity, motivating them to take action. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the role of social cohesion and collective identity in motivating protest participation [17]. Another previous study found that the employment of an excessive social control force by the National Guard against student protesters at Kent State University in 1970 tended to radicalize and increase the acceptance of violence among those directly involved, rather than pacifying or demoralizing the demonstrators as the "pacification" hypothesis would suggest. The researchers concluded that the application of extreme social control violence by authorities can backfire and contribute to the further radicalization of student protesters [26].

In terms of self-efficacy, participation in protests was found to enhance perceived self-efficacy (standardized coefficient=0.24, 95% CI=0.16-0.32). This can be explained by the sense of community and collective effort experienced during protests, which reinforces an individual's belief in their ability to effect change. This supports Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and the notion that engagement in collective action fosters empowerment and agency [21, 22]. The theoretical integration and additional interpretations of these findings underscore the importance of social cohesion and collective identity. Engagement theory and the concept of self-efficacy suggest that active involvement in protests not only enhances an individual's sense of self-efficacy but also contributes to a collective feeling of empowerment. This phenomenon is further augmented by the sense of social cohesion that arises in collective actions, echoing the findings of [Kawachi and Berkman \[11\]](#) and [Lyons \[12\]](#), who emphasize the importance of social cohesion in such contexts.

Van Zomeren et al.'s (2004) [27] dual path model helps further elucidate these findings through its delineation of instrumental and emotional pathways to protest participation. The instrumental path involves perceptions of efficacy and social support that are augmented by witnessing large-scale collective action, reinforcing beliefs in the group's ability to create change. Meanwhile, the emotional path's emphasis on appraising issues as unfairly impacting the in-group and requiring validation from others who share this view fosters feelings of empowerment and solidarity [28]. Regarding judicial reform, perceptions of threats to democratic values heightened appraisals of unfairness and group disadvantage. These activations engaged the emotional response of anger toward the issue, mobilizing opposition. Together these dual pathways integrated cognitive, affective and social validation processes to facilitate participation, and enhanced self and collective efficacy. Van Zomeren et al.'s integrative framework thus provides a useful lens for conceptualizing how protest mobilization can strengthen empowerment on both individual and collective levels. Overall, the model provides a useful lens for conceptualizing the socio-psychological dynamics that underpinned protests in this case.

The study also revealed that there was a higher rate of protest activity among those actively pursuing emigration [$\chi^2(2)=6.37$, $P=0.0414$]. Specifically, the most active protest participation (45.1%) was found among individuals taking practical steps towards emigration, compared to those merely contemplating emigration (31.7%) and those who had never considered it (36.7%). This phenomenon can be insightfully interpreted through the lens of Self-Determination Theory [29]. This theory posits that actions are fundamentally driven by intrinsic motivations and personal values. Individuals intrinsically motivated to instigate change or safeguard certain values might initially engage in protest as a form of activism. If these efforts seem ineffective, the same motivations could pivot their actions towards considering emigration as an alternative strategy to realign their circumstances with their core values.

Furthermore, this finding is further elucidated by drawing upon the concept of generalized activism [30], suggesting that individuals with a propensity for activism express this trait across various domains. The data imply a correlation between the personal characteristics of participants and their level of activity; the more inherently active an individual is, the more likely they are to engage actively in diverse spheres, encompassing both demonstrations and emigration-related actions. This aligns with the broader theoretical framework positing a strong link between personal proclivity for activism and engagement in multiple forms of civic action [31], thereby reinforcing the notion that activism is not confined to a single domain but manifests across various aspects of an individual's life.

Additionally, the study found that younger respondents exhibited significantly higher levels of engagement in practical actions related to emigration compared to older age groups. This trend could potentially be attributed to the differing perspectives on the future held by different age groups. Older adults may tend to focus less on future-oriented planning, in contrast to younger individuals who, facing a longer horizon ahead, are more inclined to actively engage in measures that shape their prospects.

Contrary to the hypothesis that individuals who have directly experienced violence would have the lowest dropout rate from protests, the findings indicated otherwise. Participants who personally experienced verbal violence reported the lowest proportion of stopping participation in protests (8.2%) [$\chi^2(2)=7.45$, $p=0.0241$]. Similarly, those who personally experienced police violence had the lowest proportion of stopping protests (5.4%) [$\chi^2(2)=6.93$, $p=0.0313$]. These results suggest that direct personal experience of violence may strengthen resolve and commitment to the cause, rather than deter participation. This could be due to a heightened sense of injustice and a stronger motivation to fight against perceived threats.

These findings can be further interpreted through the lens of social movement theory, which emphasizes the importance of collective identity and solidarity in sustaining participation in social movements. The sense of belonging and mutual support within protest groups likely contributes to the resilience and continued engagement of participants, even in the face of violence. Additionally, engagement theory suggests that active involvement in meaningful activities, such as protests, enhances an individual's sense of purpose and efficacy [11]. This theory aligns with the observed increase in self-efficacy among protest participants, highlighting the psychological benefits of civic engagement.

The significant indirect effects of age (standardized coefficient=0.06, 95% CI=0.03-0.09), perceived threat (standardized coefficient=0.05, 95% CI=0.03-0.08), and verbal violence (standardized coefficient=0.07, 95% CI=0.04-0.09) on self-efficacy, mediated through protest participation, further support the notion that these factors contribute to enhanced self-efficacy by fostering greater involvement in collective action.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants might underreport or overreport their experiences and perceptions. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are needed to better understand the long-term impacts of protest participation on well-being. Another limitation stems from the sample representation. Although the study achieved a substantial sample size, it does not encompass the entire spectrum of citizens opposed to judicial changes. Potential demographic and geographic biases within the sample might limit the generalizability of our findings to broader populations. Future research should aim to incorporate a more diverse range of participants to validate and expand upon our results. Employing longitudinal research designs in follow-up studies would allow for a more thorough investigation of the long-term effects of protest participation on self-efficacy and various well-being indicators.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of perceived threats, age, and exposure to verbal violence in motivating protest participation, which in turn enhances perceived self-efficacy. Additionally, it sheds light on the intriguing link between protest participation and practical actions related to emigration, driven by intrinsic motivations and a generalized propensity for activism. These findings underscore the importance of considering the psychological dimensions of civic engagement, particularly in the context of socio-political crises. Promoting activism and collective action can serve as a valuable public health strategy to enhance mental health and resilience, supporting individuals and communities in navigating challenging times. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of civic engagement and offers practical implications for public health promotion. The findings of this study also suggest that active involvement in protests, aligned with an individual's values and beliefs, enhances feelings of self-efficacy. This increase in self-efficacy is likely bolstered by the collective spirit and solidarity experienced in mass protests, providing individuals with the strength to confront challenges. Fostering civic participation that strengthens empowerment aligns closely with WHO's definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. The resultant well-being derived from activism underscores the significance of engagement, even under heightened threat perceptions. The transformative potential of collective action lies not only in achieving societal goals but also in enhancing the personal well-being of those involved. These findings suggest that the role of protests extends beyond the political arena, entering the realm of personal development and psychological health. This expanded view opens new avenues for exploring the interplay between social movements and individual well-being, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations and consequences of political and social activism. Facilitating empowerment through civic participation aligns closely with key health promotion goals of enabling community control over health outcomes and improving well-being.

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Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Supplementary Files

Figures

Israeli anti-judicial reform protestors in Kaplan, Tel-Aviv (Photo by Ohad Peri).



Israeli anti-judicial reform protestors in Kaplan, Tel-Aviv (Photo by Ohad Peri).



Structural equation modelling.

