

Anger motivates people to vote, study shows

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Though pundits and candidates suggest there is too much anger in politics, the emotion does have a potential benefit—it significantly motivates citizens to vote, according to a University of Michigan study.

"Anger in politics can play a particularly vital role, motivating some people to participate in ways they might ordinarily not," said Nicholas Valentino, the study's lead author and a professor of communication studies and political science. "We normally think people with a lot of resources and political skills are the ones who participate, but many citizens in this category regularly abstain from politics. Furthermore, many citizens with few resources can be mobilized if they experience strong anger.

"Anger leads citizens to harness existing skills and resources in a given election. Therefore, the process by which emotions are produced in each campaign can powerfully alter electoral outcomes."

Valentino and colleagues used an "emotion-induction task" to heighten specific [emotional](#) states in a group of participants who were assigned three conditions: anger, anxiety and enthusiasm. They were asked to recall and write about something that caused them to experience a specific emotion during the last presidential campaign. They were also asked about their political participation based on five actions: wearing a campaign button, volunteering for a campaign, attending a rally, talking to others or donating money.

Anger boosted participation by nearly one third for each of these five

behaviors, while anxiety and enthusiasm did not, the study found.

The researchers also looked at respondents' emotions in a national survey conducted during the 2008 presidential campaign. The pre-election study measured 12 emotions, including anger, fear, hope, alarm, sadness, disgust and happiness. Respondents were asked how they felt about the way things were going in the country, rating each emotion. Again, anger was strongly related to participation in the 2008 election.

In another analysis, the researchers looked at emotions and nonvoting participation from elections from 1980 to 2004. Talking to others about voting and wearing a button represented "cheap" forms of participation that require little effort or resources, while "costly" ways of participating involved attending a rally, working for a [campaign](#) and donating money. In both cases, [anger](#) boosted political participation, especially when skills and resources are factored into the equation.

Provided by University of Michigan

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