RESPONDING TO INJUSTICE: PERCEPTION, ANGER, AND IDENTIFICATION AS DRIVERS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

ABSTRACT

Much of leadership research emphasizes leaders as the key individuals in the leadership process. The current study addressed this imbalanced view of research by investigating how followers influence leadership outcomes. Specifically, the study examined how followers' perceptions of injustice, their felt anger, and group identification motivate their intentions to engage in collective action against leaders. The study revolved around the Malaysian Prime Minister's response to the 1MDB scandal and employed a cross-sectional survey method. Responses from 112 Malaysians revealed that follower perceptions of leader injustice is significantly related to their anger towards their leaders. Follower anger is in turn significantly related to intentions to engage in collective action against the leader. Results also indicated that the association between perceptions of distributive injustice and follower anger is moderated by group identification, and that group efficacy moderates the relationship between anger and intentions to engage in collective action. Anger was found to mediate the relationship between injustice perceptions and intentions to engage in collective action, but only for low and moderate levels of identification and group efficacy. The findings contribute to the growing evidence that followers are neither submissive nor subservient parties in the leadership process, but can themselves engage in actions that dictate leadership effectiveness.

Keywords:

Followership, injustice, emotion, identification, collective action

FOLLOWERS AS KEY PARTIES IN THE LEADERSHIP PROCESS

Much of leadership research emphasizes leaders as the primary actors who dictate leadership processes and outcomes. The dominance of leader-centric approaches is evident in initial conceptions of leadership theory, with a heavy focus on leader traits and behaviors (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Zaccaro, 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, and Humphrey (2011) show in their meta-analysis that leader traits and behaviors account for at least 31% of the variance in leadership effectiveness. These authors, however, highlight that much of leadership literature is fragmented, and that the study of leadership can benefit from integrative models that better explain the antecedents of effective leadership. Contemporary perspectives on leadership and the antecedents of leadership effectiveness have both shifted away from focusing solely on individual-level leader traits and behaviors to more relational and contextual elements. These newer perspectives are consistent with the inherently social – and relational nature of leadership (Popper, 2004). Indeed, recent meta-reviews of leader-member exchange (LMX) research highlight the importance of a leader's relationships with their followers as integral in understanding leadership effectiveness. Dulebohn and colleagues' (2012) review of 247 studies of leader-member relationships highlight how leader, follower and situational factors all contribute to LMX quality. In another meta-analysis of LMX theory, Rockstuhl and associates (2012) highlight how high-quality leader-member relationships are essential in leading to desirable leadership and organizational outcomes. This meta-review of 282 independent samples showed that trust between leaders and followers was correlated with organizational citizenship behaviors, job satisfaction and justice perceptions, with minor variation across national cultures.

A review of past leadership research reflects a notable pattern of how scholars approach the study of leadership processes. Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) suggested that researchers exhibit a tendency to 'romanticize' leadership, in which they simplify complex group or organizational outcomes as driven solely by leader-centered elements. Bligh, Kohles, and Pillai (2011) also highlight this inclination amongst leadership scholars, proposing that more research is required to address the crucial second half of the leadership process – followership. Understandably, the study of leadership has traditionally emphasized the role of those in positions of authority and their capacity to influence. To gain a more holistic view of leadership processes and the antecedents of leadership effectiveness, however, we argue for the importance of understanding the influence of followers in the leadership equation. Calls for follower-centered leadership studies (see Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Bligh, 2011; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014) have, fortunately, not gone unheeded. Growing theoretical developments and empirical evidence reveal how followers are central to understanding leadership effectiveness (Carsten et al., 2010; Leroy, Anseel, Garner & Sels, 2012; Sy, 2010).

The shift towards follower-centric perspectives on leadership is important to the leadership literature for at least three reasons. First, given the social nature of leadership, the leader-follower relationship can be better understood in light of how followers influence leaders. In effect, this focus draws the conceptualization of leadership away from being a form of minority influence (Maass & Clark, 1984; Wood et al., 1994), to assess how followers, who form the majority in the influence process, also dictate group and organizational outcomes. Not surprisingly, initial leadership theories have drawn from social psychology research on minority influence. Examining leader traits and behaviors as antecedents of influence was at that time consistent with Great Men/Great Women theories of leadership that developed alongside

personality research. Second, a greater emphasis on followers as active parties in the leadership process allows us to examine specific actions that can be taken by followers towards leaders. Follower-centric approaches to leadership disregard assumptions that followers' behaviors are strictly reactive and compliant (Baker, 2007; Lord & Hall, 1992). This perspective has important theoretical significance for understanding the roots of follower-centric actions that take the form of majority influence. Third, understanding followers – particularly their perceptions of leaders, provides a clearer depiction of antecedents to compliance, commitment, or resistance. This reasoning essentially builds on the notion of leadership as a social process; that follower responses to leadership influence attempts go beyond (mere) compliance, and serve as an alternative psychological barometer of the leader's effectiveness. The importance of followers' perceptions of leaders is inherent within charismatic and transformational leadership theories. Charisma may be a function of follower perception and/or emotion; a function of both follower cognition (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Schyns & Sanders, 2007) and affect (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Erez et al., 2008). Both of these follower-centric elements subsequently determine support or resistance towards a leader's influence.

Historical evidence provides real-life accounts of follower reactions towards ineffectual leadership. Such follower reactions and behaviors may take many forms. A review of research in the political sphere, for example, highlights civil disobedience as an example of follower actions towards authority (Atleson, 1973; Hayes, 2007). Fewer empirical studies, however, have been conducted to directly examine the mechanisms by which this form of follower action arises. Haan's (1975) study is one exception. Examining hypothetical and actual moral reasoning processes in situations of civil disobedience, the author found that ideologies that were inconsistent with personal values elevated sensitivity to authority conflict. This intrapersonal

conflict in turn, manifested itself in negative views towards authority, and possibly, action

against that authority. Studies examining worker strikes provide another body of evidence of

follower collective action toward authority figures or governing institutions. Butollo and ten

Brink (2012) examined the migrant-worker protests in China in 2010, and found a pattern in the

manner in which such strikes were organized. The authors highlight that the strikes were formed

on the basis of a common identity – Chinese nationals saw themselves as the marginalized,

victimized group threatened by migrant workers. Butollo and ten Brink (2010) labelled this

extreme form of follower action as 'worker militancy', and the strike constituted a reaction

towards the central Chinese government. Similarly, a growing interest in the unionization of

labor forces in Vietnam reveals how bottom-up, follower-driven actions can influence leaders

and governing institutions. Anner and Liu (2015) found that workers in unionized workplaces in

Vietnam were more likely to engage in wildcat strikes (unauthorized, sudden work stoppages) as

a means to instigate action through their trade union membership. Cox (2015) argues that such

actions are in effect, a bottom-up influence to pressure unions into providing better working

conditions and pay. Both the strike incidents in China and Vietnam are expressions of worker

discontent and follower action in rapidly-developing economies that prioritize profit and

financial gain at the expense of workers' safety and rights.

Civil disobedience and wildcat strikes are just two expressions of bottom-up, follower-

driven influence. However, we know little about how such influences emerge as a function of

both leader- and follower-relevant factors. The leadership literature is mostly devoid of a study

of such follower actions. The wealth of information and research of follower-driven actions

resides outside of the mainstream leadership and organizational behavior literature. To the best

of our knowledge and review, no study yet published in the leadership literature focuses directly

on the interaction between leaders and followers that instigate follower action against leaders. In the following section, we review one model of leadership that may be best placed to frame new understandings of follower action, and contribute to follower-centric research on leadership – the social identity model of leadership.

SOCIAL IDENTITY MODELS OF LEADERSHIP AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

In contrast with preceding theories of leadership, the social identity model of leadership (SIMOL) departs from a strictly leader-centric perspective on effective leadership. Central to the SIMOL is that leaders are embedded within, and thus, part of the groups of followers they lead (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer & Hogg, 2003). In essence, the model proposes that effective leadership rests on leaders' ability to manage the identity of the groups they lead. The model prescribes two key elements integral to follower approval and support of leaders – leader prototypicality and leader in-group serving behaviors (van Knippenberg, 2011). Effective management of followers' collective identity depends first on how representative the leader is of their group, and second, on the actions they take to affirm their group's identity. The social identity model of leadership is crucially important for framing initial understandings of followership processes. Research adopting this model reveals that leadership effectiveness is a function of the extent to which followers endorse or disapprove of their leaders (Derue & Ashford, 2010; Platow et al., 1997; Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). According to the SIMOL, a leader's effectiveness is influenced by followers' perceptions of leaders – whether they are perceived as (1) being representative of their groups and (2) acting in a group-serving, identity-affirming manner.

In Tee, Paulsen, and Ashkanasy's (2013) theoretical work, we find one attempt towards theorizing pathways by which followers act in response to leaders who violate these two group-relevant normative expectations. In their model, the authors propose a pathway consisting of follower's perception and emotion, which may subsequently translate to intentions to engage in collective action towards leaders. The authors build on the evidence from studies of collective action, defined as any concerted, collective effort taken by a group of individuals towards meeting a common objective (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Extending on the social identity model, van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2008) proposed the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), which suggests that followers' perceptions of injustice, efficacy, and identity are central elements in motivating collective action. The SIMCA extends on the SIMOL by elaborating on possible pathways through which followers' perceptions and group-relevant identity may be enacted in the form of collective action. More importantly, social identity perspectives on leadership and collective action are not inconsistent with established trait and behavioral approaches of leadership effectiveness. Social identity models – both of leadership and collective action, consider how traits and behaviors contribute to leadership effectiveness relative to the context of the leader's group identity. While the SIMOL focuses on leader characteristics and behaviors that trigger follower support or disapproval, the SIMCA suggests the mechanisms by which these perceptions translate to follower action. Leader's traits perceived by followers as representative of or similar to the group prototype, as well as leader's actions consistent with group norms and expectations, are both predictors of positive leadership outcomes and effective influence outcomes (Johnson et al., 2012; Jackson & Johnson, 2012; Wells & Aicher, 2013). Empirical evidence provides support for the SIMCA, suggesting that these follower perceptions are key to understanding the basis for follower collective action (van

Zomeren & Iyer, 2009; van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2010; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; van Zomeren, Spears, & Leach, 2008). In the following section, we review follower perceptions, emotion and identification as key components of collective action. We then build the links on which followers translate these perceptions into action against leaders.

Perceptions of Injustice

Perceptions of a leader's group prototypicality are shaped by followers' judgments of whether leaders are leading in a manner that upholds the group's salient identity. A violation of this expectation tends to result in disapproval of the leader. One such action that may trigger disapproval among followers occurs when the leader is perceived to be unjust. Colquitt (2001) conceptualized four dimensions of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice. We note Goldman and Cropanzano's (2015) argument that a clear conceptual distinction between "justice" and "fairness" should be made. Accordingly, we concur with these authors in defining justice to refer to whether one adheres to certain rules or standards (i.e. conduct as morally required), while fairness relates to how one responds to perceptions of these rules (i.e. the conduct is morally praiseworthy; Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015: 313). Our study focuses on perceptions of justice, in examining if respondents view leaders as adhering to certain rules or standards, although some of the research that informs our current study is also shaped by studies focusing on fairness as well.

Perceptions of distributive justice are formed when followers perceive that rewards and/or resources are allocated equitably by the leader (Adams, 1965). Conversely, procedural justice concerns the procedure on which such distributions of resources and rewards are made (Thibault & Walker, 1975). Interpersonal justice refers to individuals' perception of the extent to which they are treated with respect, courtesy, and dignity during the enactment of formal

procedures (Colquitt, 2001). Lastly, perceptions of informational justice are formed following

organizational communications that involve honest, thorough, timely, reasonable, and tailored

explanations of decision procedures (Colquitt, 2001). Evidence from a variety of studies suggests

that these perceptions form the basis for perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Tyler and De

Cremer (2005), for instance, found that when leaders act in procedurally just ways, followers

view leaders as more legitimate – with the effect being stronger for followers who strongly

identified with their organization. De Cremer and Van Knippenberg (2002) identified leader

procedural fairness, along with charisma, as antecedents to group cooperation. Researchers have

also established the role of informational justice as an antecedent of survivors' turnover intention

in the wake of organizational downsizing (Kim, 2009), former employees' organizational

retaliation following layoffs (Skarlicki, Barclay, & Douglas, 2008), overall success of merger

and acquisition integration process (Ro, Lamont, & Ellis, 2013), and employees' maintenance of

affective and normative commitment to organizational change (Shin, Seo, Shapiro, & Taylor,

2015).

Studies have also illustrated outcomes associated with followers' perceptions of leader

injustice. Seppälä, Liponnen, and Pirttilä-Backman (2012) found that leaders needed to act in a

manner that is perceived as just – simply being prototypical is insufficient to garner follower

trust. These findings echo Haslam's (2004) assertion that simply being representative is

insufficient to be perceived as effective. Thus, leaders need be perceived as acting in a manner

beneficial to their followers in order to be judged favorably. De Cremer (2003) suggests

inconsistent leadership behaviors may lead to perceptions of leader procedural unfairness. The

author reports that inconsistent leaders impact followers' perceptions of certainty and social self-

esteem – an important aspect of one's social identity. Unfairness, in essence, is a violation of

followers' perceptions of justice, which often results in a sense of demeaned self (De Cremer, Wubben, & Brebels, 2008). Tyler and Blader (2003) propose that individuals identify themselves through their social identities, and rely on social identities as affirmations of their extended selves. Strong, stable social identities are formed on the basis of pride and respect towards one's social identity. A leader who transgresses on followers' social identities by acting in an unpredictable, ambiguous, or unjust manner is likely to provoke a negative response from followers. Results from these studies also show that when procedural and distributive justice is low, followers may collectively distrust leaders (Kramer, 1999). Perceptions of injustice and mistrust, along with a demeaned sense of self may arouse emotional reactions in followers. Arguably the most salient emotional expression of follower discontent and disapproval towards unjust leaders is anger (Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998).

Follower Anger

Followers' expressions of anger can be an affective response towards actions perceived as demeaning to one's self, resulting from a displeasing violation of expectations (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). Anger can also be triggered by blocked goals and actions perceived as being deliberate and intentional in deterring the attainment of goals (Berkowitz, 1989). Most relevant for the present study is anger in the context of a response towards actions that demean the self. When leaders are perceived as unjust, the sense of self of many followers may be threatened, which in turn may provoke collective action and responses towards leaders. Functionally, the expression of anger is useful in at least two ways. First, being an approach-oriented emotion, anger is likely to motivate follower behaviors to redress perceived or experienced injustice. Anger is also a status-conferring emotion (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Tiedens, 2001). Evident in studies conducted within a negotiation context, expressions of anger

can elevate one's status in a bargaining situation, resulting in more optimal and fair negotiation outcomes. Anger may thus become a core psychological driver in helping followers respond to status imbalances in leader-follower interactions and force leaders into possibly changing their behaviors. Leader actions that are perceived as unjust stoke followers' anger, as the inequity inflicted upon them may be seen as a threat to collective honor and dignity (Miller, 2001).

Research on workplace aggression also provides a consistent, clear indicator that injustices are triggers of worker aggression. Hershcovis and colleagues (2007), in their meta-analysis of 57 empirical studies highlight both poor leadership and injustice as antecedents of employee anger. Specifically, perceptions of injustice (distributive, procedural, and interpersonal) as well as poor leadership predict supervisor-targeted aggression, more so than co-worker-targeted aggression (Hershcovis et al., 2007). Similarly, Fitness (2000) found that being unjustly treated was the chief cause of employee anger towards their superiors, relative to superior immoral behavior, job incompetence, disrespect, and experiences of public humiliation. Fitness' (2000) findings have also been replicated in Kennedy, Homant, and Homant's (2004) study. In this latter study, the authors also found that when employees perceived interpersonal, rather than distributive injustice, they provided direct support for aggressive reactions as a response to this injustice. Tripp and Bies (2010) and Tripp, Biess, and Aquino (2007) label these aggressive, retaliatory responses 'revenge as justice' - emotional reactions aimed at restoring injustices both perceived and experienced in the workplace. Further, employees are more likely to take action against employers when they perceive the climate as being low on procedural and interactional justice (Scarlicki & Folger, 1997).

Common across these studies is the acknowledgement that emotion plays an important role in translating perceptions into action. Focusing on emotion as the first outcome of

perceptions of injustice is therefore important in understanding follower collective action against leaders. In this respect, emotions prompted by followers' perceptions of leader injustice may precede their decision to act towards leaders. Murphy and Tyler (2008) find evidence from two studies showing that emotional reactions mediate the relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and subsequent compliance behavior. Another study by Van YPeren, Hagedoorn, Zweers, and Postma (2000) showed state negative affect as mediating the relationship between injustice and turnover intentions. Finally, results from Barclay, Scarlicki and Pugh's (2005) study showed how outward-focused emotion such as anger and hostility mediated the relationship between perceptions of justice and retaliation behaviors. Evident across these studies is the fact that emotions drive behaviors, and mediate the perception-action link amongst followers. The first pathway in constructing our current model of followership is linking perceptions of injustice with anger, hence the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1a: Follower perceptions of distributive injustice will be positively correlated with anger towards leaders.*
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> *Hypothesis 1b: Follower perceptions of procedural injustice will be positively correlated with anger towards leaders.*
>
> *Hypothesis 1c: Follower perceptions of interpersonal injustice will be positively correlated with anger towards leaders.*
>
> *Hypothesis 1d: Follower perceptions of informational injustice will be positively correlated with anger towards leaders.*

Intention to Engage in Collective Action

Both cognitive and emotional mechanisms contribute towards follower's intention to engage in collective action against leaders perceived as unjust. Theoretical work by Tee and

colleagues (2013) suggest that the intention to act against leaders is in part, explained via the 'black sheep effect' (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988; Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010). In-group members who behave in a deviant, non-conforming manner that threatens group identity will be perceived as being non-prototypical, and thus, judged more harshly than out-group members. This hypothesis has received considerable support, and, more importantly, is consistent with social identity models of leadership. Leaders acting in an unjust manner threaten in-group solidarity through actions that disrupt the stability of the followers' social identity, and will collectively threaten group stability and harmony. Rejection of leaders who behave in such a manner may be a proactive, direct attempt by followers to preserve the salient group identity. This process involves a 're-categorization' process in the minds of followers. Leaders who are perceived as unjust are re-categorized as being non-prototypical, which in turn elicits anger and motivates intentions to respond towards leader injustice. The resulting follower anger may be a result of two underlying mechanisms. First, the leader has essentially betrayed followers' trust in upholding their social identities, resulting in a demeaned sense of self. Second, this betrayal forces a strong, reactionary response since it violates the fundamental expectation that the leader should act as an in-group member. A violation of this expectation elicits harsher penalties towards leaders who were expected to uphold the collective group identity (Marques & Paez, 1994). For these reasons, we propose that followers' cognition and emotion collectively motivate intentions to engage in collective action against leaders. Our second hypothesis is thus:

Hypothesis 2: Follower anger will be positively correlated with their intentions to engage in collective action against leaders.

Follower Identification and Perceptions of Group Efficacy

While perception and emotion are fundamental drivers of collective action, research findings suggest that the strength with which followers identify with their groups is an essential element in determining participation in collective action. Indeed, it may be the strength of identification with the group that elevates followers' perceptions of efficacy and belief that their anger will trigger a response from leaders. The effects of anger on intention to engage in collective action will be particularly pronounced if followers believe that their actions will succeed in altering leader behaviors. Thomas, McGarty, and Mavor (2009a) propose that unless both a sense of identification and emotions are sufficiently high, followers will not be motivated enough to act in sustaining social and political action. The strength of follower identification towards their groups may be the key difference between action and apathy (Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009b). Miller, Cronin, Garcia, and Branscombe (2009) highlight that the lack of perceived group efficacy results instead in follower fear; overriding the effects of anger in motivating collective action. Threats of leader retaliation in response to follower dissent may inhibit followers' intentions to engage in collective action. To give rise to sufficiently strong and sustained intentions to engage in collective action, followers must therefore perceive leaders as unjust, experience sufficient anger towards those leaders, identify strongly with other followers who share the same perceptions and emotions, *and* perceive that their emotional expressions are sufficiently efficacious in leading to influential collective action.

The strength of followers' identification with groups acting in response to unjust leaders, or in promoting social change appear consistently as a factor predicting collective action (Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Klandermans, 2002; Polleta & Jasper, 2001). Simon and colleagues (1998) highlight that the decision to engage in collective action is based on one of two independent pathways – (1) a cost-benefit calculation of the potential success or

impact of the collective action and (2) collective identification as an activist. Both of these pathways map neatly to the present model of collective action. In this study, we argue that followers are more likely to experience anger as a result of perceived leader injustice if they identify strongly with fellow dissenters, and are more likely to participate in collective action if they perceive that their collective anger and identities will be sufficiently efficacious in inciting change in leader behavior. In effect, the links between perception and emotion, and between emotion and behavior will be moderated by the strength of followers' identification with the in-group. In the first link, we therefore hypothesize that the relationship between perceptions of leader injustice and intensity of anger will be stronger for followers who identify strongly with their in-group, relative to those who identify weakly with their in-group. We also expect that perceptions of group efficacy will moderate the strength of the emotion-behavior link. Followers who feel anger are more likely to engage in collective action if they also have a strong, as opposed to weak, level of identification with their in-group. Followers who feel anger are more likely to engage in collective action if they perceive their groups as being sufficiently efficacious. Taken together, these hypotheses are consistent with social identity perspectives of leadership and collective action, and with current, established understandings of the links between perception, emotion, and collective action. In summary, our hypotheses are based on research suggesting that both strength of identification and perceived group efficacy influence collective, collaborative efforts against leaders. Hypotheses 3a and 3b are thus:

> *Hypothesis 3a: Follower identification will moderate the relationship between follower perceptions of injustice and follower anger. The relationship between follower perceptions of injustice and anger will be stronger for followers who strongly identify with their group, compared with followers who identify weakly with their group.*

Hypothesis 3b: Follower perceptions of group efficacy will moderate the relationship between follower anger and follower intention to engage in collective action. The relationship between follower anger and intentions to engage in collective action will be stronger for followers who perceive their group efficacy as high, than when they perceive their group efficacy as low.

A Model of Follower Perception, Anger, and Identification as a Pathway to Follower Collective Action

We suggest that followers' perceptions of their leaders will elicit an affective response, which in turn, will influence their behaviors. In the context of the present study, we focus on followers' perceptions of ineffectual leadership, exemplified in cases when leaders are acting in an unjust manner. Such perceptions are likely to rouse feelings of anger amongst followers. These emotions, in turn, influence the likelihood that followers take action against the leaders, in a form of collective action. The perception-emotion and emotion-behavior links are expected to be moderated by the strength of follower identification with their groups and perceptions of group efficacy. Implied in the relationships is that follower anger will mediate the relationship between perceptions of leader injustice and follower intentions to engage in collective action. The fourth hypothesis for this study is thus:

Hypothesis 4: Follower anger will mediate the relationship between follower perceptions of injustice and follower intention to engage in collective action.

A diagrammatic representation of the proposed relationships, along with the hypotheses, is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 here

METHOD

Design

The current study employs a cross-sectional survey method. Data were collected using an online survey, administered to prospective respondents through an email invitation.

Context

This study revolves around the controversial 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) venture, which saw Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak redirecting the flow of funds from the venture to his personal accounts. 1MDB is a development company owned by the Malaysian government and oversees major development projects towards modernizing infrastructure in the country. On 2nd July 2015, the Wall Street Journal reported that funds amounting to RM 2.6 billion (approximately USD 700 million) were deposited into Prime Minister Najib Razak's personal bank accounts, sparking allegations of fraudulent accounting practices and corruption within the upper echelons of Malaysian government. News of these allegations stirred disputes and accusations from major political parties in the country, as well as provoking reactions from the ruling coalition. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission provided a statement on 3rd August 2015 clearing the Prime Minister of corruption, stating that the funds were from donors. These donors, however, were not identified, leading the public and opposition parties to continually express suspicion and form accusatory statements regarding both the source of the funds, and the Prime Minister's involvement in the allocation of the funds. On 29th of July 2015, members of the public assembled in major locations around the capital, Kuala Lumpur, to protest against the Prime Minister and ruling government, with calls for Najib Razak's resignation. At the time of writing, the Prime Minister continues to be the target of criticism primarily from political parties and members of the civil society, with many continuing the call for his

resignation. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed has also lent his support to a coalition comprising key members of the opposition party in March 2016, escalating the pressure for Najib Razak's resignation.

This particular incident provides a suitably rich and appropriate backdrop on which to examine how public perceptions of injustice in leadership and emotions towards leaders motivate intentions to engage in collective action towards leaders. We also heed calls for greater appreciation of the context in which leadership is studied, and examine the dynamics of followership in a collectivist, high-power distance country such as Malaysia (Liden & Antonakis, 2009). Kennedy's (2002) assessment of leadership styles in Malaysia suggest a preference amongst followers for autocratic approaches of leading that acknowledge hierarchical differences and emphasize collective harmony. Schermerhorn and Bond (1997) state that leader-follower power distance differences and extent of collectivism do shape the extent of follower behaviors. We propose that an examination of followership and collective action tendencies in Malaysia's high power-distance, collectivist culture will contribute to an understanding of follower actions. The collectivist aspect of Malaysian culture may in part explain the tendency of engaging in collective action, but understanding how Malaysians overcome the culturally-dictated norms of hierarchy and status imposed by a high power-distance culture will provide a more culturally-sensitive view of followership in this particular context.

Sample

One-hundred and twelve (112) Malaysians (average age 25.27 years, 31 men, 77 women, 4 unspecified) participated in this study. The majority of respondents were of Chinese ethnicity (60.7%). Malay and Indian respondents represented 9.8% and 19.6% respectively of all total

responses, with the remainder comprising mixed or other ethnicities. The majority of respondents (93.6%) have completed at least vocational/technical school education.

Measures

Perceptions of justice. We used 20 items from Colquitt's (2001) measure of organizational justice. These items assess individual perceptions of the extent to which they perceive procedural, distributive, interpersonal and informational justice with regards to a particular outcome on a five-point Likert-type scale. All four factors relating to this scale display high levels of reliability (procedural justice = .93; distributive justice = .93; interpersonal justice = .92; informational justice = .90, as reported by Colquitt, 2001). In our current study, we adapted the items to suit the context of our study. The 'outcome' in our study relates to the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's decision to justify the funds in his personal bank accounts as being a donation from an unknown source. For instance, an item on the procedural justice dimension reads as, "I would say that the procedures used by the Prime Minister in handling the 1MDB situation have been free of bias". An item relating to informational justice is adapted to read as, "I would say that the Prime Minister has been honest in his communications with Malaysians regarding the 1MDB situation".

Follower anger. Given the links between perceptions of injustice and anger (Hershcovis et al., 2007; van YPeren et al. 2000; Barclay et al. 2005), we assessed follower anger on a series of items anchored on five-point Likert scales. The five-item scale is derived from van Zomeren and colleagues (2001) and includes items such as "Hearing, or reading about the Prime Minister in relation the 1MDB situation, I feel angry / furious / irritated / displeased / outraged". Van Zomeren and colleagues (2001) report this scale as reliable at .94 and .93 across their two studies.

Follower perceptions of group efficacy. We assessed the extent to which followers (i.e. Malaysian citizens) perceive their groups (in this case, fellow Malaysians) to be sufficiently efficacious in prompting change in the Prime Minister's actions using four items from Van Zomeren and colleagues' (2001). Van Zomeren and colleagues (2001) used two items for assessing group efficacy across two studies, and found the items to be significantly correlated with each other at $r = .42$, $p < .01$ for Study 1 and $r = .75$, $p < .01$ for Study 2. We combined both sets of items and adapted them to construct a 4-item measure for this current study. One such item is, "As a Malaysian hearing about the 1MDB situation, I think together we are able to influence the outcome of the 1MDB situation."

Group identification. Five items from van Zomeren and colleagues' (2010) study were used to assess the extent of respondent identification with other Malaysians. Items include "I see myself as a Malaysian" and "I identify with other Malaysians", assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Van Zomeren and colleagues (2010) used these items in two studies, reporting a reliability of .91 for Study 1 and .70 for Study 2. In this study, "group" refers to the Malaysian population in general, and in this instance can also be considered a measure of national identification.

Intentions to engage in collective action. We used items from van Zomeren and colleagues' (2001; 2004) studies to construct and tailor a set of 5 items assessing respondents' intentions to engage in collective action. These items have been shown to be reliable, with alpha values of at least .82 (as reported in Study 2 of van Zomeren et al., 2004). Items from this scale include, "I would like to participate in raising our collective voice towards the Prime Minister" and "I would like to do something with fellow Malaysians to voice up against the Prime Minister."

Procedure

Data were collected via an online survey. The survey link was sent out to members of the general public via an email invitation. A total of 183 surveys were returned, though many of the responses were only partially completed. Responses were discarded if they completed less than 80% of the total number questions on the survey. The final usable data set consisted of 112 responses. These included some partial responses where socio-demographic information were left incomplete. Data collection took a month, commencing 3rd February 2016 and ending on 10th March 2016.

RESULTS

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Principal components analysis (i.e. common factors analysis) was used to examine the underlying factor structure of the 20 justice items adapted for the current study. The analysis returns a Keyser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of .88. The Barlett's test of sphericity is significant at $p < .01$ ($x^2 = 1526.98$, $df = 190$). Collectively, these imply adequacy of the current sample size, as well as substantial correlations between items with factors to warrant systematic classification of the underlying factors. Results of the common factor analysis with Varimax rotation suggests the presence of four distinct factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and accounting for 68.04% of the total variance. All items loaded onto distinct factors at .321 and higher.

Bivariate correlations and scale reliabilities

Scale reliability values and inter-correlations between all variables are presented in Table 1. All scales demonstrate an acceptable level of reliability ($\alpha \geq .73$).

Insert Table 1 about here

Hypothesis Tests

We conducted the assessment of both moderation and mediation effects simultaneously using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro. The PROCESS macro allows for the assessment of the unconditional indirect effect of follower perceptions of justice (X) on their intentions to engage in collective action (Y) though follower anger (M), as moderated by group identification (W_a) and group efficacy (W_b). For the analyses using the PROCESS macro, we conducted four tests – one for each set of justice perceptions. The PROCESS macro computes the relevant statistics for hypothesis testing in two models. The first model consists of the first interaction term (perceptions of justice x group identification; $X * W_a$) with follower anger (M) as the outcome variable. We refer to this model as the interaction model in our results. The second model consists of all variables, with followers' intentions to engage in collective action as the outcome variable. This model also tests the conditional indirect effect of X on Y. That is, PROCESS assesses if the effect of X and Y is significantly explained by another variable M (which is necessary to infer a mediation effect), while also considering the influence of both moderators (perceptions of justice x group identification, $X * W_a$; anger x group efficacy, $X * W_b$). We refer to this model as the full model in our results. In all tests, we used 1000 bootstrap samples and set the confidence intervals at 95%.

Perceptions of Procedural Justice. Results of the analysis using the PROCESS macro show that perceptions of procedural justice has a significant and negative relationship with anger (β = -.61, $p <$. 01; 95% CI = [-88, -.32]. The interaction term of perceptions of procedural justice and group identification was not a significant predictor of follower anger (β = .31, p = .20; 95%

CI = [-16, .78]. The interaction model is significant, and explains 17% of the variance of

follower anger (3, 105, F = 7.21; p < .01). In the full model, follower anger interacted with

perceptions of group efficacy in predicting follower intentions to engage in collective action (β =

-.15, p < .05; 95% CI = [-29, -.01]. Follower anger was a significant mediator only at low and

mean levels of group identification and group efficacy. Follower anger was not a significant

mediator when both group identification and group efficacy was high. This full model explains

25% of the total variance in intentions to engage in collective action (4, 104, F = 8.61, p <.01).

Table 2 depicts the results of this analysis.

Insert Table 2 about here

Perceptions of Distributive Justice. The interaction model showed that the interaction

term between followers' perceptions of distributive justice and their group identification was a

significant predictor of follower anger (β = -.42, p < .05; 95% CI = [.09, .75]. This model is also

a significant predictor of follower anger overall, explaining 14% of total variance in the outcome

variable (3, 105, F = 5.72, p < .01). In the full model, follower anger interacted with perceptions

of group efficacy as a significant predictor of follower intentions to engage in collective action (β

= -.17, p < .05; 95% CI = [-.32, -.02]. As with the tests for indirect effects, anger only mediated

the relationship between follower perceptions of distributive justice with intentions to engage in

collective action at low and mean levels of group identification and group efficacy. The direct

effect of follower justice perceptions on intentions to engage in collective action was also not

significant (effect = -.06, p = .45; 95% CI = [-.20, .09]). The full model explains 20% of the total

variance in follower intentions to engage in collective action (4, 104, F = 6.47, p < .01). Results

of this analysis is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Perceptions of Interpersonal Justice. Follower perceptions of interpersonal injustice did

not significantly interact with group identification in predicting follower anger (β = .24, p = .20;

95% CI = [-.13, .60]. Interpersonal justice has a significant, and negative relationship with

follower anger (β = - .54, p < .01; 95% CI = [-.75, -.33]. The interaction model is significant and

explains 25% of total variance in follower anger (3, 105, F = 11.40, p < .01). The full model

shows that perceptions of interpersonal justice has a significant main effect on follower

intentions to engage in collective action β = -.36, p < .01; 95% CI = [-.54, -.18]. The interaction

term between anger and group efficacy, however, was not significant (β = -.13, p = .06; 95% CI

= [-.27, .01]). Anger mediates the relationship between perceptions of interpersonal injustice and

intentions to engage in collective action only when group identification and efficacy are at low or

mean levels. The full model is significant, explaining 30% of variance in follower intentions to

engage in collective action (4, 104, F = 11.33, p <.01). The conditional indirect effects analysis

related to this analysis is presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Perceptions of Informational Justice. The interaction model was overall significant (3,

105, F = 7.41, p <.01), and informational justice was a significant predictor of follower anger (β

= -.52, p < .01; 95% CI = [-.76, -.28]. The interaction term of informational justice and group

identification, however, was not significant (β = .40, p = .08; 95% CI = [-.05, .83]). The full

model, where intentions to engage in collective action is the outcome, is also significant overall

(4, 104, F = 8.09, p < .01). The interaction term of anger and group efficacy is not significant (β

= -.14, p = .05; 95% CI = [-.05, .00]. Anger mediates the relationship between perceptions of

informational justice and intentions to engage in collective action only when group identification

and efficacy are at low or mean levels. These findings are presented in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

DISCUSSION

We summarize the results by stating that the first main effect hypothesis is supported –

follower perceptions of leader justice (all forms) are significantly and negatively related to their

anger towards those leaders. The second main effect hypothesis, that follower anger is

significantly related to intentions to engage in collective action, is also supported. We showed

that the relationship between perceptions of distributive justice and anger is moderated by group

identification, and that group efficacy moderates the relationship between follower anger and

intentions to engage in collective action. This finding provides partial support for Hypotheses 3a

and 3b for distributive justice only. Unexpectedly, the moderating effect of group efficacy on the

relationship between follower anger and intentions to engage in collective action was in the

opposite direction than hypothesized. This finding appears counter-intuitive, but we suggest may

be a consequence of followers perceiving groups to be sufficiently efficacious and thereby, not

requiring additional support or participation. This may be a reflection of what we would like to

initially term 'collective complacency.' The collectivist nature of Malaysian culture may have

influenced citizens' perceptions, leading them to believe that if activist groups were sufficiently

efficacious in promoting change, then individual efforts and activist actions may not be directly

necessary. Conversely, low levels of group efficacy may instead reinforce Malaysians' collective

identity, motivating citizens to stand up and give voice. In short, it may be possible that when

followers perceive activist groups or their fellow citizens to be sufficiently efficacious in promoting change in the leader, that at the individual level, they opt out of participating directly in collective action efforts. Participation in collective action has also been discouraged by the ruling government in Malaysia. Vocal criticisms of the government – expressed in person or online have instigated government investigations and charges against dissenting voices in public. Such actions may have had an inhibitory effect on followers' overall intentions to engage in collective action. Finally, results show some support for Hypothesis 4, in that follower anger mediates the relationship between justice perceptions and intentions to engage in collective action. The mediating effect, however, may only occur under certain levels of the moderators examined. Specifically, anger only mediates the relationship between justice perceptions and intentions to engage in collective action when anger and identification were low and moderate, rather than when they were high.

Our findings suggest that not all forms of perceived injustice operate in the same way across contexts, circumstances or situations. The present study shows that the effect of followers' perceptions of distributive justice on collective action tendencies operated via follower anger. All other justice perceptions had a direct link with follower intentions to engage in collective action – anger appears to only have a modest influence in mediating the relationship between these other forms of anger with intentions to engage in collective action. Other psychological mechanisms may explain the link between justice perceptions with intentions to engage in collective action that do not rely on emotions. The findings here, however, suggest that anger is perhaps only relevant and necessary to mobilize action and effort in injustice contexts that are deemed most relevant and salient. Malaysian respondents were most likely aware of the discrete, numerical (and thus, tangible) value of the allegedly misappropriated funds amounting to RM 2.6

billion (USD 700 million), but perhaps, less so regarding the procedures, interpersonal actions and information shared by the Prime Minister in relation to these funds. The situation could be perceived as a misappropriation of public funds, which is clearly a violation of distributive justice. Perhaps this perception is why respondents felt particularly aggrieved and more likely to lead to anger, and consequently, translate their anger towards collective action. Collectively, the findings reiterate the importance of considering context in understanding the psychological processes underlying leadership processes (Liden & Antonakis, 2009).

Theoretical Implications

Results from the current study highlight the importance of considering context in studies of followers where social identity processes are salient. The current study, highlighting the 1MDB scandal, reflects distributive injustice, rather than other forms of justice. As such, it may be likely that followership – as expressed via collective action, is triggered by different psychological mechanisms and emotions. We provide evidence that this is the case, extending past research on collective action and showing that each situation and event needs to be considered in light of its cultural, social, and political elements. Our findings also provides a direct test of followership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), examining collective action as one direct way in which followers mobilize themselves, forming coalitions, and channeling efforts towards influencing leaders. Finally, our findings also extend research on collective action, by suggesting that the interplay between justice perceptions and emotions may be more complex than previously assumed. The findings are largely consistent with past research on collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2010), but suggest the need to consider relationships between cognition and emotion that are perhaps, not linear. Follower emotions and perceptions may

perhaps share a more iterative, or additive relationship than a linear mediational model as proposed in this study.

Practical Implications

Results from the current study underscore the importance of understanding how follower coalitions form, and suggest that follower perceptions of justice are important criteria motivating their intentions to engage in collective action. These perceptions have a direct effect on followers' motivations to engage in, associate with, or partake in collective efforts in voicing disagreement or disapproval of the leader. Recognizing these key psychological elements is crucial for both leaders and followers, particularly in the realm of socio-political activism. Leaders, for instance, may need to convey a greater level of transparency in communications with followers; perceptions of injustice may stem from followers perceiving leaders as concealing or being dishonest in their decision-making processes (i.e. procedural injustice), and this may lead to lowered levels of trust and support for the leader. These broad suggestions have implications in shaping followers' perceptions of leader authenticity.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

Findings of the current study, however, need to be viewed as tentative and suggestive of how collective action intentions are formed. First, as with most studies conducted on fast-changing, evolving events, our cross-sectional study may not have sufficiently captured the change in opinions, views, and emotions towards the 1MDB scandal. Followers' perceptions to engage in collective action would have undoubtedly changed as more information regarding the Prime Minister's involvement was made known through the media. In this regard, a longitudinal study of the event may have shed some additional findings on the ebbs and flows of collective action tendencies throughout an extended period of time. That said, such context-rich and time-

bound events are in themselves useful for further analysis, providing an insightful glimpse into followership dynamics in a high power distance culture.

Second, our sample size was also somewhat constrained by the sensitive nature of this topic. This sensitivity may explain the substantial non-response and drop-out rate of our respondents, wherein we obtained only 112 usable responses from a total of 183 responses. A further examination of the incomplete responses suggest that most respondents dropped out of the study after reading the first question, which requested ratings of the Prime Minister's procedural justice. It is likely that this non-response bias is a consequence of warnings put forth by the Malaysian government, in that charges may be laid against individuals who express critical or dissenting views online. Our sample size, however, is sufficient for meeting the desired statistical power for analyses, given the number of variables in our study. Computations were conducted via G*Power (Faul et al., 2009), which states that a minimum sample of 85 is required to attain a power level of .80, given medium effect sizes ($f^2 = .15$) at the $p < .05$ level.

Third, further studies should also consider the value of qualitative methods in better understanding the cultural and contextual influences on followership and collective action in the Malaysian context. Contextual and cultural influences may provide some explanation for some of the unexpected findings in this study (e.g., why group efficacy suppresses rather than enhances the link between follower anger and collective action tendencies). Our explanation for this anomalous finding is speculative, and as such, we invite and encourage further research to investigate the dynamics of followership and collective action within the socio-political context of a high-power distance nation such as Malaysia.

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FIGURE 1

Theoretical model and hypotheses

H$_{3a}$ **H$_4$**   **H$_{3b}$**

| Follower Group Identification | | Follower Anger | | Follower Perceptions of Group Efficacy |

H$_1$ **H$_2$**

| Follower Perceptions of Injustice | | | | Follower Intention to Engage in Collective Action |
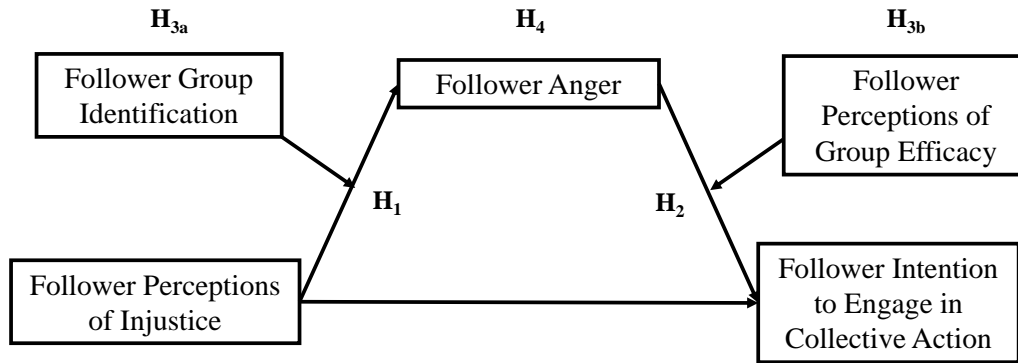
TABLE 1

Bivariate Correlations

	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	25.27	8.92												
2. Gender	1.71	.45	-.53**											
3. Ethnicity	2.27	.83	.04	-.02										
4. Education	2.46	.84	.23*	-.14	.23*									
5. Procedural Justice	1.74	.56	-.10	.10	.00	-.11	(.73)							
6. Distributive Justice	1.71	.86	-.14	.00	.04	-.12	.66**	(.93)						
7. Interpersonal Justice	1.75	.73	-.06	-.10	-.07	.03	.54**	.37**	(.84)					
8. Informational Justice	1.53	.63	-.14	-.07	-.01	-.02	.66**	.69**	.71**	(.85)				
9. Anger	4.06	.87	.29**	-.09	.05	-.04	-.41**	-.30**	-.50**	-.40**	(.92)			
10. Group Efficacy	3.08	.93	-.03	.04	-.03	-.10	.08	.14	-.02	.01	-.09	(.86)		
11. Group Identification	3.75	.62	-.01	.18	.06	-.05	-.04	.07	-.12	-.05	.09	.16	(.76)	
12. Collective Action Tendency	3.96	.68	.11	-.05	.06	.03	-.38**	-.17	-.50**	-.37**	.38**	.06	.13	(.83)

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 2

Conditional indirect effect(s) of follower perceptions of informational injustice on intentions to

engage in collective action at values of the moderator(s)

Group Identification	Group Efficacy	Effect	Boot SE	Lower 95% Level Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Level Confidence Interval
Low	Low	-.30**	.12	-.52	-.09
Low	Mean	-.19**	.10	-.40	-.05
Low	High	-.09	.11	-.37	.07
Mean	Low	-.23**	.16	-.48	-.05
Mean	Mean	-.14**	.09	-.35	-.02
Mean	High	-.06	.08	-.31	.05
High	Low	-.15	.15	-.50	.09
High	Mean	-.10	.10	-.35	.05
High	High	-.04	.07	-.29	.02

Notes

IV = Perceptions of procedural justice

DV = Intentions to engage in collective action

TABLE 3

Conditional indirect effect(s) of follower perceptions of informational injustice on intentions to

engage in collective action at values of the moderator(s)

Group Identification	Group Efficacy	Effect	Boot SE	Lower 95% Level Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Level Confidence Interval
Low	Low	-.27**	.11	-.49	-.10
Low	Mean	-.18**	.09	-.37	-.06
Low	High	-.09	.10	-.33	.04
Mean	Low	-.15**	.07	-.28	-.05
Mean	Mean	-.10**	.05	-.21	-.02
Mean	High	-.05	.05	-.19	.02
High	Low	-.03	.08	-.19	.10
High	Mean	-.02	.05	-.14	.06
High	High	-.01	.03	-.10	.03

Notes

IV = Perceptions of distributive justice

DV = Intentions to engage in collective action

TABLE 4

Conditional indirect effect(s) of follower perceptions of informational injustice on intentions to

engage in collective action at values of the moderator(s)

Group Identification	Group Efficacy	Effect	Boot SE	Lower 95% Level Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Level Confidence Interval
Low	Low	-.20**	.09	-.41	-.04
Low	Mean	-.12**	.07	-.26	-.01
Low	High	-.03	.08	-.25	.08
Mean	Low	-.16**	.09	-.34	-.03
Mean	Mean	-.09**	.06	-.22	.00
Mean	High	-.03	.07	-.20	.06
High	Low	-.11	.10	-.34	.02
High	Mean	-.07	.07	-.23	.01
High	High	-.02	.06	-.19	.04

Notes

IV = Perceptions of interpersonal justice

DV = Intentions to engage in collective action

TABLE 5

Conditional indirect effect(s) of follower perceptions of informational injustice on intentions to

engage in collective action at values of the moderator(s)

Group Identification	Group Efficacy	Effect	Boot SE	Lower 95% Level Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Level Confidence Interval
Low	Low	-.29**	.11	-.51	-.11
Low	Mean	-.19**	.10	-.40	-.06
Low	High	-.09	.11	-.39	.06
Mean	Low	-.20**	.09	-.38	-.07
Mean	Mean	-.13**	.07	-.30	-.04
Mean	High	-.06	.08	-.27	.04
High	Low	-.10	.11	-.37	.04
High	Mean	-.07	.07	-.27	.02
High	High	-.03	.05	-.21	.02

Notes

IV = Perceptions of informational justice

DV = Intentions to engage in collective action

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