# The role of System Justification and Leader Legitimacy in explaining Group Reactions towards Controversial Leadership

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**Abstract**

There is substantial research investigating the underlying criteria of what makes a 'good' leader, yet research often neglects to investigate the role of followers in leader-group dynamics. Followers may be just as essential for successful leadership, as research in the transgression credit has shown that ingroup members tend to support their leaders, even when they engage in transgressive behaviour. In this research, we present 9 studies (3 experimental, 4 correlational, and 2 longitudinal) to explore underlying group's acceptance vs. rejection of transgressive and controversial leaders. The first set of studies (Studies 1-3) experimentally demonstrated that followers that perceived their leaders as more legitimate, were also more accepting of their leader's transgressions. This effect of leader legitimacy persisted even in the absence of formal social control measures towards the transgressive leader (Study 2), or when controlling for leader prototypicality (Study 3). In the second set of studies (Studies 4-6), we consistently found strong associations between system justification beliefs and attributions of legitimacy towards three arguably controversial leaders – Donald Trump, Theresa May, and Boris Johnson – ultimately predicting distinctive cognitive and emotional reactions towards such leaders. In the last set of studies (Studies 7-9), we integrated the role of national identification and intergroup threat processes in our overall model to further explore the legitimization of controversial leaders. In sum, we found that more nationalistic citizens are more supportive of the status quo which, in turn, explains greater legitimacy for conservative leaders (typically known for their stricter stance on immigration) which, in turn, is associated with participants' harsher attitudes towards immigrants. Altogether, these results suggest that people who strongly identify with their group, will further support the current system in place, will legitimize more leaders protective of that same system (albeit through controversial measures), thus fuelling (and potentially justifying) their own attitudes towards outgroups.

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## Thesis Overview

The present work is divided into six chapters. Chapters I and II present a general framework of the main theoretical background behind this research, leading up to the rationale and hypotheses tested in this thesis. Chapters III-V incorporate the main studies comprised of PhD research, divided into three distinct papers, each tackling a part of our overall research model. Chapter VI summarises the presented findings and includes a general discussion dedicated to the main theoretical and practical contributions from this work, alongside its respective limitations and potential ideas for future research. Below I provide a brief description of each chapter.

Chapter I first introduces the debate regarding the potential factors that determine differing group reaction outcomes towards controversial, or even morally transgressive leaders. While there is significant research on what makes a leader good or bad, there is a significant lack of information on the psychological processes that explain why (some) 'bad' leaders can at times maintain their power and continue with their transgressive behaviour. Previous research on the transgression credit has shown that ingroup leaders are awarded a double standard that allows them to transgress from the group norms more leniently in comparison to regular member or outgroup leaders. However, this does not account for the situations where transgressive ingroup leaders elicit extreme negative reactions from the group and are consequently punished or expelled from the leadership. To explain this, I propose a new theoretical model, in which leader legitimacy is as a potential attribute that functions as a boundary condition between acceptance *vs.* rejection of transgressive leaders.

Chapter II describes existing research on system justification theory and extends existing theorising by proposing that system justifying beliefs might be proximal predictors of perceptions of legitimacy in leaders that protect the system. In this sense, this chapter seeks to build on the previous 'leader legitimacy' model through the use a combination of social and

person-level factors to explain group reactions towards controversial leaders. Specifically, system justification would be the distal predictor of group reactions towards transgressive leaders, while leader legitimacy would be the proximal predictor that would define the spectrum of acceptance vs rejection towards such leaders.

Chapter III is the first empirical chapter and it tests the idea that leader legitimacy may be a pivotal factor in determining group reactions towards transgressive leaders. In three experimental studies, I manipulate the group's perceptions of legitimacy regarding a transgressive leader and observe if participants apply the transgression credit towards transgressive legitimate leaders, while rejecting illegitimate leaders (Study 1). Furthermore, I test if these reactions are influenced by the knowledge of existing (or absent) formal punishment mechanisms inflicted upon the transgressive leader (Study 2), and how leader legitimacy interacts with leader prototypicality (Study 3).

Chapter IV builds on the results observed in the previous chapter and empirically tests the propositions advanced in Chapter II. Specifically, it applies a combination of social (leader legitimacy) and person-level factor (system justification) psychological factors in explaining reactions towards existing political leaders who have been shrouded in controversy during their mandates. In three studies (two correlational and one longitudinal), I test a new conceptual model that includes system justification as the distal predictor and leader legitimacy as the proximal predictor of positive vs negative reactions towards US President Donald Trump (Study 4), former UK Prime Minister Theresa May (Study 5), and current UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (Study 6).

Chapter V is the final empirical chapter and it applies the collected evidence obtained from the previous studies and incorporates intergroup processes theories to further explore our theoretical model on the legitimization of controversial leaders. Specifically, I investigate the role of national identification and perceptions of intergroup threat towards immigrants on the

legitimacy of leaders who typically protect the status quo, particularly the former UK Prime Minister Theresa May (Study 7), current US President Donald Trump (Study 8), and current UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (Study 9). In three studies (two correlational and one longitudinal), I propose that the psychological process of legitimizing system-justifying leaders is explained sequentially by people's group identification (i.e. national identity) and intergroup (symbolic and realistic) threat towards outgroup members (i.e. immigrants).

Chapter VI, as the final chapter of this thesis, presents an overview of the main findings and conclusions deriving from this work as it proposes new theoretical contributions and implications for the understanding of leadership and group processes, addresses potential limitations and suggests future steps for this research.

## Chapter I: Transgressive leadership and leader legitimacy

*"Will people ever be wise enough to refuse to follow bad leaders or take away the freedom of other people? – Eleanor Roosevelt*

Arguments about leaders' dishonest, unfair, corrupt, or immoral behaviour in large organisations (Hoyt, Price, & Poatsy, 2013; Kellerman, 2004) are often the topic for public debate. Similar phenomena can be observed with political leaders, as shown by events in recent years in Brazil, South Korea, or the United States, for example. The on-going global financial crisis that emerged in 2008 caused, perhaps the most severe economic recession so far in the 21st century. Too many political leaders were to blame for the problem. In fact, mass protests broke out in several Western countries and showed popular resent against political leaderships (Shah, 2011). As a case in point, in Europe, as the financial crisis developed, people started pointing fingers towards European governments and leaders (Hobolt, 2015). This often culminated in public petitions and demonstrations, many of which demanding political leaders' resignation. Some countries took it even further: Iceland, for example, criminally charged their former prime minister, on the account that he did not foresee and prevent the emerging financial crisis (Horn, 2012). It is not surprising, then, that several European leaders were removed from power after 2008 (Sanchez, 2012).

Even though such behaviour is regarded as unambiguously "bad" (Abrams, Palmer, Rutland, Cameron, & Van de Vyver, 2014), followers do not always perceive these leaders that clearly transgress important norms as undesirable or harmful to the group. For instance, research has shown that these leaders have more leeway to deviate from norms when they have accumulated idiosyncrasy credits (Hollander, 1958, 1992, 2006), are prototypical (e.g., Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg, 2011), or have been recently appointed and endowed with the conferral to lead (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008; Abrams, Travaglino, Marques, Pinto, & Levine, 2018). However, there is less research accounting for

the situations where groups actually reject immoral and harmful actions from their leaders (e.g., Abrams, Travaglino, Randsley de Moura, & May, 2014; Karelaia & Keck, 2013). As such, there is a gap in understanding which processes drive groups to accept *vs.* punish their own transgressive leaders.

### 1.1 Transgressive Leadership

Transgressive leadership is perceived as morally questionable behaviour that goes beyond mere opinion deviance, which may involve breaking laws or rules within a common social context (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013). These transgressions can be perceived to be driven by leaders' selfish, dishonest, or discriminatory attitudes (Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; R. C. Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). However, whereas followers are usually punished for adopting similar behaviour, ingroup leaders are often exempt from the same punishment (Abrams et al., 2013). Indeed, research on the transgression credit demonstrated that transgressive ingroup leaders may be treated leniently compared to similarly transgressive outgroup leaders and ingroup or outgroup regular members (Abrams et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Considering that leaders usually embody the group prototype (e.g., Hogg, 2001; Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998; Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012), a negative reaction towards ingroup leaders might be perceived as a negative reaction towards the group itself. In this sense, tolerating an ingroup leader's transgression may be seen as an act of group loyalty (Abrams et al., 2013).

This is not always the case. For example transgressive ingroup leaders are depreciated when they are perceived to threaten members' social identity (Abrams, Travaglino, et al., 2014). This might be because disruptions in leadership, like challenges or violations of the group's values, can reflect a flaw of the group itself and threaten the group's identity (Balser & Carmin, 2009). These feelings of threat can elicit hostile emotions, like anger (Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003; Sadler, Lineberger, Correll, & Park, 2005),

subsequently fuelling spontaneous and impulsive aggressive behaviours (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & van Dijk, 2011). This suggests that followers can sometimes perceive transgressive ingroup leaders as threatening to their group, which may elicit derogatory and punitive reactions from the group. However, it is not yet clear what leads followers to feel threatened by transgressive leaders as opposed to tolerating their transgression. Based on previous evidence highlighting the importance of leader legitimacy on leader evaluation and endorsement, I propose that leader legitimacy will function as an important boundary condition for understanding how and when transgressive ingroup leaders pose a threat to the group.

### 1.2 Leader Legitimacy

*"There is the authority of the extraordinary (…), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership (…) as exercised by the (…) elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the great demagogue, or the political party leader" – Max Weber.*

This idea reflects to a large extent the kind of perceptions that underlie followers' adherence to their leaders' actions, an adherence that is granted by the followers' beliefs on the leaders' legitimate source of authority (e.g., Ben-Yoav, Hollander, & Carnevale, 1983; cf. also Barbuto Jr, 2000; Oc & Bashsbur, 2013). Legitimacy is a psychological attribute that allows leaders to gather the support of followers, because their power is seen as both deserved and justified (Caddick, 1982; Tyler, 2006). This attribute constitutes the basis for leader selection in democratic systems (e.g., election of political leaders), and it is ultimately linked with leaders' standing with their followers (Bass & Bass, 2009). Although it is possible for leaders to hold substantial power in authoritarian regimes, this does not necessarily equate to having influence over their citizens. Rather than imposed authority, exercising influence requires persuading and obtaining endorsement from followers

(Hollander, 2009). Indeed, a leader's authority to make decisions for the group is generally dependent on the legitimacy of these decisions (McShane & Glinow, 2012). Legitimacy comprises an essential factor in leader-follower relationships, as it enables the granting of trust towards a leader and extends the belief that they are entitled to be obeyed (Hollander, 2006). An individual considered worthy – *legitimate* – of leadership of the group will achieve further endorsement by its members to maintain control and influence in the group (Michener & Burt, 1975). In short, legitimacy "is the validation of the leader, acknowledging him or her in the leader role" (Hollander, 2006).

Some have initially argued that the process of legitimacy begins with the form of ascension to the leadership role, as elected leaders generally create higher expectations than appointed leaders (Julian, Hollander, & Regula, 1969). However, significant research has also shown that leaders' legitimacy is acknowledged by followers through the display of trustworthiness, credibility, competence, fairness, and previous task success, rather than by simply exercising authority (Ratcliff & Vescio, 2017; Tyler, 2006; Vial, Napier, & Brescoll, 2016; Willis, Guinote, & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2010). The crucial aspect of legitimacy is the underlying belief that decisions made by the legitimate authorities are considered valid and entitled to be obeyed by virtue of the legitimate figure (Tyler, 2006). In this sense, legitimacy becomes a requirement for a leader's ability to exert influence and power, which ultimately creates a sense of duty and obligation amongst followers (Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009). This readiness to accept and comply with legitimate leaders (Magee & Frasier, 2014; Tyler, 2002) can even overcome followers' moral standards, such as when followers give leaders the power to determine what is right and wrong (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Therefore, it is possible that transgressive leaders escape punishment when they are legitimated within the

group. In contrast, it is likely that followers are motivated to challenge illegitimate leaders' authority and support more punitive measures towards their transgressive behaviour.

### 1.3 Social Control and Collective Protest

Social control is typically the act of punishing group members who violate important social or group-specific norms (e.g., ingroup deviants), which can be a major way for a group to control and attenuate the potential damage caused to the group, and to reinforce adherence to social norms (Erikson, 1964; Gibbs, 1977; Levine, 1989; Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Hogg, 2001; van Prooijen, 2018). However, when the group's social control mechanisms are perceived to be ineffective, group members shift to participation and endorsement of non-normative collective actions – informal measures to control or punish the offenders, often using unconventional means (Campos et al., 2017; Tausch et al., 2011). Such informal social control actions can range from participation in peaceful collective demonstrations to participation in civil disorder (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Tausch et al., 2011). They can also encompass intense informal punitive reactions aimed at compensating for the sources' inability to ensure or restore a perceived state of justice (Strelan & van Prooijen, 2013).

Collective protest is a form of collective action in which highly identified group members engage when they perceive their group to be a target of social injustice (Abrams & Randsley de Moura, 2002; Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, & De Weerd, 2002). Contrasting with normative collective actions that aim to protect and reinforce social norms, nonnormative actions exist to threaten the existing social order (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). These nonnormative actions are strongly predicted by negative emotions, such as: 1) anger, as it induces a tendency to punish people who violate norms (Smith & Kessler, 2004; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004), and 2) shame, as the transgression could reflect a flaw in the group's identity (Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005). In this sense, such emotions function as accelerators or amplifiers of protest

(van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2017), connected to the goal of challenging and confronting targets responsible for injustice (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). As such, group members then express their anger and shame directed at leaders who violate the group's shared beliefs and values by protesting against these leaders (van Stekelenburg et al., 2011; see also, Paez, Javaloy, Wlodarczyk, Espelt, & Rimé, 2013; Stürmer & Simon, 2009; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010). Thus, collective protest should reflect a group reaction through which group members demand the punishment of a transgressive illegitimate leader.

In contrast to situations where the group commits to punish and remove their leaders from power (and challenging the system itself in the process), there are also many instances in which people generally tolerate or even support the status quo, even when doing so from a relatively disadvantageous position within the group. In fact, system-challenging collective actions have been consistently found to be negatively correlated with system justification beliefs (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Gaucher, & Stern, 2015). This is because people that tend to justify the system more are less likely to perceive injustice within the group and feel dissatisfied or angry at the system (Osborne, Jost, Becker, Badaan, & Sibley, 2019). This dichotomy raises a potential link between the perceived legitimacy of the leadership and the justification (or legitimacy) of the system itself. Although system justification theory had initially focused on stereotyping and outgroup favouritism (Jost & Major, 2001), it eventually expanded to explain many other factors, including the perceived legitimacy of authorities (van der Toorn, Tyler, & Jost, 2011). In the next chapter, I explore how individual system justification beliefs interact with perceptions of legitimacy regarding leadership. I propose that person-level factors associated with endorsement of status-quo are also important for the understanding of differential reactions towards leaders. Particularly, I will focus on the role

of system justification as a factor that contributes to explain the extent to which a controversial or unethical leader is perceived as legitimate.

## Chapter II: System justification on leader legitimacy

*The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness - John Kenneth Galbraith*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is not uncommon to observe situations where individuals tolerate arguably questionable or controversial leaders, or even leaders who transgress from common rules of conduct (Karelaia & Keck, 2013; Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2011). The 2016 US presidential elections, for example, were particularly marked by controversy and resulted in the election of an unexpected and controversial leader – Donald Trump. Despite triggering anger in some, occasionally in the form of protest (Ansari, 2016; Helmore, 2016), Trump still managed to obtain a large and steady amount of supporters. As a result, Trump's first year of presidency was marked by controversy and demonstrations either in favour or against him (Sabbagh, 2018). Some argue that the US has become the most divided it has been since the civil war (Lynch, 2017). Across the Atlantic, the UK has also been facing its own leadership challenges. Following David Cameron's resignation in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, Theresa May was appointed as his successor by the Conservative Party (without a General Election), thus potentially raising some controversy behind her legitimacy as the new UK Prime Minister. Very shortly afterwards, May was heavily criticized for calling for a snap election in an attempt to obtain a clearer government majority (BBC, 2017) and a mandate for Brexit negotiations – especially when previously denying that she would call one (Stone, 2017). The outcome of these elections led to the loss of the majority for the Conservative Party. About three years later, May resigned from her role, opening the spot for Boris Johnson, whom repeated a similar feat: initially appointed as the PM by the Conservative Party, shortly followed by a snap election. However, Johnson managed to obtain a significant majority after

the 2019 General Elections. Similarly to Trump, Johnson is also known for his controversial remarks regarding several social issues, particularly regarding minorities and migrants (Perraudin, 2019), and at times promises for a hard Brexit.

In light of the societal divisions that controversial leaders trigger or represent, it is essential to investigate the social psychological factors that might explain people's positive *vs.* negative reactions towards such controversial leaders. This topic gains particular importance in the face of new and uncertain threats, as Covid19, where effective leadership is crucial. This research proposes that leader legitimacy is a key factor that determines whether people will accept vs. reject leaders who are accused of being unethical. Furthermore, I propose that those who more likely endorse system justifying beliefs are more likely to perceive legitimacy in their leaders. Thus, I combine well-established but separate areas of research – system justification theory on the one hand (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), and literature on the legitimisation processes of leadership / group-based approach to leadership theories (Hollander, 1992; Tyler, 2006) – to propose and test a novel model in which system justification is a distal predictor and leader legitimacy a proximal predictor of reactions to controversial leaders.

### 2.1 Group Reactions towards Controversial Leaders

The purpose of norms is to provide a form of social consensus on thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Gaertner, Hogg, & Tindale, 2005), essentially defining a range of acceptable behaviour within the group (Forsyth, 1990, 1995). Individuals who violate these norms (often labelled as deviants) may pose a threat to the group's social image, inevitably triggering intentions from the group to sanction the deviant member (Chekroun & Nugier, 2011). The idea that groups dislike members who deviate from norms is well-established. For example, research on the *black sheep effect* (e.g., Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988) has consistently found that individuals strongly derogate ingroup

members who hinder positive ingroup distinctiveness (i.e. how well the group does in comparison to an outgroup) and weaken ingroup norms due to their deviant opinions or behaviour.

In a similar vein, some research suggests that unethical leaders may lose their endorsement by their groups, and that they may be negatively judged if they threaten the group's beliefs in a positive social identity (Abrams, Travaglino, Randsley de Moura, & May, 2014). Unethical behaviour is typically described as dishonest, unfair, corruptive behaviour, deriving from low empathy and responsibility of others, due to one's pursuit of self-interest, and manipulation/misuse of others (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014). In this sense, a leader's behaviour should be deemed as *unethical* when considered as 'unequivocally immoral, illegal, or deviant' (c.f. D. M. Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009). However, in comparison to regular ingroup members, reactions to leaders who misbehave are less straightforward. In fact, breaking rules and adopting risky behaviour is usually perceived as somewhat consistent with good leadership (Kramer, 2003). Moreover, under certain conditions, leaders can be given latitude for counter-normative opinions and behaviour – sometimes even endorsed by the group for deviating from the norms (Abrams et al., 2008). Furthermore, people seem to generally apply a double standard when reacting to ingroup leaders who engage in moral transgressions (Abrams et al., 2013). Compared to outgroup leaders and to regular (i.e. non-leaders) ingroup and outgroup members, ingroup leaders who transgress are given transgression credit, whereby they are treated leniently, and even supported by group members (Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Therefore, there is currently a gap in the understanding of when unethical or controversial leaders are punished or endorsed by ingroup members. I propose that leader legitimacy is implicated in determining whether people perceive a controversial leader as ethical or unethical, and whether they should be supported or actually pose a threat to group.

### 2.2. Leader Legitimacy

People that view authority figures as deserving of their role, also legitimize and follow their decisions (e.g., Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Lind, 1992), especially when authority figures hold power over them (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Haines & Jost, 2000; Kay & Zanna, 2009). Unlike formal power, however, leader legitimacy derives from followers' perceptions that the leader's power is deserved and justified (Caddick, 1982; Tyler, 2006). Legitimate leaders are ultimately seen as having acquired attributes essential to leadership from their followers, such as credibility, trust, loyalty, and ability to effectively exercise power and influence over their followers (Hollander, 2009). Thus, it is likely that legitimacy paves the road to validation of the leader. When followers accept leaders as legitimate, they will be considerably more willing to comply with their leaders' requests or actions (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly, & Konopaske, 2012). In fact, legitimate leaders obtain followers' obedience through choice more easily, rather than having to force obedience (Levi et al., 2009; Tyler, 2002). Leader legitimacy may even bypass individuals' moral standards, as they comply with the duty/obligation to obey legitimate authorities (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). In other words, people might blur moral boundaries and the interpretation of morality (what is right or wrong) when judging legitimate leaders' behaviours. This might lead individuals to disregard their own morals, allowing legitimacy to shape their attitudes and behaviour (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Thus, I examine the role of leader legitimacy as an important psychological mechanism that might lead followers to accept a leader's transgressions, so that the more legitimate individuals perceive their leader to be, the more they will be likely to turn a blind eye to the leader's unethical behaviour. Furthermore, as previous research hints that system justification processes may lead to enhanced legitimacy of authorities (van der Toorn et al., 2011), I also explore individuals' system justification beliefs as a likely determining factor in conveying legitimacy towards these controversial leaders.

### 2.3 System Justification

Vial et al. (2016, p. 402) sum up that: “Power, status, and legitimacy are distinct but intimately related constructs”. People who more strongly believe that the system is just, are more inclined to legitimize the authority figure (and their power) to protect that system from changing (Badaan et al., 2018; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Research on system justification theory has shown that people are motivated to perceive their social system as relatively fair and just, resulting in greater support and protection of the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004). Indeed, system justification promotes the endorsement of the current social structure, even when doing so implies accepting clear social inequalities (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Ni Sullivan, 2003; Osborne & Sibley, 2014). This mechanism serves the purpose of satisfying the psychological need for general feelings of certainty, security and order (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost et al., 2015; Jost, Langer, et al., 2017). In contrast, active support and engagement in social change often requires undergoing significant uncertainty about the future, potential shifts in interpersonal relations and the potential backlash from authorities (Badaan et al., 2018). As such, people may find it easier to accept and accommodate the currently established status quo, rather than fighting it (Kay, Gaucher, et al., 2009). In this way, a system justifying audience may be drawn to leaders who project ideologies that defend the status quo, such as religious (e.g., Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008) and conservative ideologies (e.g., Jost, Langer, et al., 2017). Albeit controversial, Trump’s campaign “Make America Great Again” advocated for securing and maintaining order in the US, even if at the potential expense of minorities. Similarly, May has supported extreme policies on immigration, such as threatening to deport immigrants that “can’t prove they earn enough” (Agerholm, 2016). Likewise, Johnson has strongly pushed forward for the UK to leave the EU, and even proposed a “points-based immigration system” as an arguably extreme attempt to reduce immigration (Schofield, 2020).

In a sense, those who more strongly endorse the system might be more willing to accept social inequality as a reasonable price to pay for general feelings of security and structure. This is consistent with previous research showing that conservatives, or people who support right wing parties (who typically support stricter immigration policies), are generally high system-justifiers, motivated to protect the hierarchical and traditional social order (Jost, Becker, Osborne, & Badaan, 2017). These motivation tendencies for system justification shape individuals' judgments of the legitimacy of the current status quo and further deference to authority (van der Toorn et al., 2011). For the people that are more prone to justify the system, it may be more congruent to also justify the individuals who control and maintain these systems. In this vein, system justification might also lead people to legitimise controversial leaders, who otherwise would be perceived or accused of being unethical. I propose that those who more strongly endorse the system will be more likely to legitimise those leaders who endorse extreme views and/or support extreme policies that are inherently linked to protect the hierarchical and traditional social order. In turn, it is likely that whether or not unethical leaders are perceived as a threat to the group, depends on whether or not those leaders are legitimized by the group.

## Chapter III: Legitimacy in transgressive leadership [1]

In the present research, I investigate the impact of leader legitimacy on group reactions to transgressive leaders. Building on the notion that illegitimate leaders generally obtain less support from followers than do legitimate leaders (Ratcliff & Vescio, 2017), I test the role of leader legitimacy as an important contextual boundary of transgressive leadership. Specifically, I suggest that leader legitimacy should explain the differential outcomes between support *vs* rejection of leaders who break moral norms. In this sense, I propose that leader legitimacy allows for greater transgression because followers abdicate moral authority to their legitimate leaders. I will also test how followers react to (il)legitimate leaders that depending on whether they have been punished by the ingroup or not. Finally, I will attempt to disentangle leader legitimacy from other related concepts such as leader prototypicality. I use an experimental vignette methodology across studies to construct organisationally relevant scenarios whilst also maintaining experimental control (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Firstly, I manipulate leader legitimacy and measure how threatening to the group and punishable an illegitimate *vs.* legitimate leader is (Study 1). Secondly, I investigate whether the presence or absence of social control (punishment measures) moderates the effect of leader legitimacy on the acceptance *vs.* support for punishment of transgressive leaders (Study 2). Finally, I test the independent role that leader legitimacy plays in explaining reactions towards transgressive leaders, by testing whether its effects are additive to those of prototypicality (i.e. the extent to which a leader is seen as representative, best exemplar of the

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group) or whether legitimacy and prototypicality interact in predicting reactions to transgressive leaders (Study 3).

## 3. 1 Study 1[2]

Previous research has suggested that ingroup leaders are given transgression credit, compared to ingroup regular members (i.e. non-leaders; Abrams et al., 2013). Study 1 tests the prediction that ingroup leaders are given transgression credit only when they are perceived as legitimate as opposed to illegitimate. Given that illegitimate leaders lack trust and loyalty from group members (Hollander, 2009), I predict that their transgressions are more likely to be perceived as highly threatening to the group and, therefore, in need of being controlled. As such, I expect participants to support measures of formal punishment more (i.e. higher social control) when judging transgressive illegitimate (*vs.* legitimate) leaders. I hypothesize that transgressive illegitimate leaders will trigger more negative reactions (group threat and formal punishment), compared to transgressive legitimate leaders.

### 3.1.1 Method

**Participants and design**. In order to reach a broad population, participants were recruited in public spaces with pen and paper questionnaires in a large city in mainland Portugal. The sample consisted of 116 Portuguese respondents (42 men, 65 women, and 9 who did not report gender), aged from 18 to 69 years old ($M$ = 25.84; $SD$ = 10.12). A Post hoc power analysis with $\alpha = .05$ revealed that this sample size afforded approximately 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r = .25$ (G*Power; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) for

[2] Study 1 presented here is part of the author's Master thesis, which is presented for context rather than examination as it served as the foundation for the sequent studies in this chapter, which are original for the PhD.

the main effect of leader legitimacy on the dependent variables. The experiment was a Legitimate vs. Illegitimate between-participants design.

**Procedure.** A positive social group identity is a necessary condition for the transgression credit (Abrams et al., 2013; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Russo, 2015), and it is also essential for people's readiness to engage in collective action, when they are threatened or treated unjustly (De Weerd & Klandermans, 1999; Reicher, 1996). Therefore, a highly salient group is necessary to test the hypothesis. As such, I used scenarios in a national (Portuguese) context and I started the study by measuring participants' national identification. Then, participants were presented with the scenario of a transgressive leader from a public national level organisation, which included the Leader Legitimacy manipulation, presented through a piece of (fictitious) news. Participants read about a Portuguese leader, "Vítor Almeida", of a Portuguese public-private venture (an organisation that was ostensibly part of the Ministry of Health) who was managing the construction of a hospital that would cover a significant part of Portugal with implications on the country's health system. This information was designed to make the Portuguese national identity salient and ensure that participants engaged with the scenario, by perceiving the organisation's goals as relevant to the ingroup. The scenario was followed by measures of perceived legitimacy, group threat, and formal punishment.

***Leader Legitimacy manipulation***. The Leader Legitimacy manipulation was based on whether the group elected the leader or whether the leader was nominated (adapted from Julian et al., 1969), alongside attributes known to endow leaders with legitimacy, such as perceived competence, trustworthiness, and previous task success (e.g., Hollander, 2006). In the Legitimate condition, participants learned that the absolute majority of co-workers elected the leader for the role of President. Moreover, participants also read statements made by the leader's business partners and employees, demonstrating that the leader was generally trusted

and acknowledged by the group, and that they had high expectations regarding the leader's performance. In the Illegitimate condition, participants learned that the leader had been appointed by the government rather than elected by the leader's co-workers, whom demonstrated a lack of acknowledgement, trust and support for the leader, and that they were not confident about the leader's future performance.

***Leader Transgression.*** Following the Leader Legitimacy manipulation, participants learned of some of the leader's transgressions, specifically the way he ignored a few safety measures to spare time and how he made reductions to employees' wages in order to compensate for the costs of the construction of the hospital[3].

**Control measures / Manipulation check.**

***National identification***. National identification was measured by the following items (adapted from Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1998) (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "Being Portuguese is important to define who I am"; (2) "Portuguese citizens are valuable people"; (3) "I am glad to have been born in Portugal"; (4) "I am proud to be Portuguese". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

***Perceived legitimacy (Manipulation check)***. Participants were asked to judge leader legitimacy on four bipolar items: "I believe that Vítor Almeida is": (*1 = Untrustworthy, Illegitimate, Not credible, Not Acknowledged; 7 = Trustworthy, Legitimate, Credible, and Acknowledged*). A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

[3] The leader's transgression was tested through a pilot study. Participants ($N = 26$) were asked to evaluate several actions supposedly implemented by leaders of projects related to PPP institutions [*1 = Completely wrong; 7 = Completely right*]. Results showed that the statements "He ignored a few safety measures to spare time" and "He made reductions to the workers' wages in order to compensate for the costs of the construction of the hospital" were the most negatively evaluated, ($M = 2.15$, $DP = 1.46$) and ($M = 2.42$, $DP = 1.27$) respectively. Thus, these statements were selected for the transgression manipulation for the experiment.

**Dependent Measures**

***Group threat.*** Participants gave their opinion about the threatening character of the transgressive leader to the group in three items (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "This individual jeopardizes the country"; (2) "These situations threaten our country's image"; (3) "The content of this news report undermines my confidence in the Portuguese political system". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .84).

***Formal punishment***. Participants gave their agreement on several possible punitive reactions that the group could implement towards the target (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "Vítor Almeida should maintain his role of President in the project" (reversed); (2) "Authorities should carry out an audit of the activities of the President and the accounts of the company"; (3) "Authorities should initiate a disciplinary procedure to Vítor Almeida"; (4) "Vítor Almeida should be demoted and become an integrated member without exerting management decisions"; (5) "Vítor Almeida should be fired"; (6) "Authorities should open a judicial inquiry regarding Vítor Almeida". A Principal Components Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation showed that the six items saturated on a single factor explaining 53.63% of variance. A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .82).

### 3.1.2 Results

Table 1 and Table 2 provide descriptive statistics and correlations for measures in Study 1.

Table 1. *Correlations between variables (Study 1).*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Leader Legitimacy | – | | | |
| 2. National Identification | .051 | – | | |
| 3. Perceived Legitimacy (MC) | -.527*** | .082 | – | |
| 4. Group Threat | .375*** | .088 | -.386*** | – |
| 5. Formal Punishment | .273** | .107 | -.482*** | .440*** |

*Note*. Leader Legitimacy coded: Legitimate = -1; Illegitimate = 1

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

**Control measures / Manipulation check**.

***National identification***. Participants were on average highly identified with the ingroup ($M = 5.67$; $SD = 1.08$), as this mean was higher than the mid-point of the scale (4), $t(115) = 16.58$, $p < .001$. There were no a priori differences in terms of national identification between experimental conditions, $F(1,114) = .301$, $p = .584$.

***Perceived legitimacy***. An analysis of variance showed that participants perceived greater legitimacy in the Legitimate condition than in the Illegitimate condition, $F(1,114) = 43.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .278$, which confirms the effectiveness of the Leader Legitimacy manipulation.

**Dependent measures**

***Group threat.*** As expected, an analysis of variance showed a significant effect of Leader Legitimacy, whereby participants perceived the transgressive leader as more threatening to the group in the Illegitimate condition than in the Legitimate condition, $F(1,114) = 18.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .141$.

***Formal punishment***. As predicted, the analysis revealed a significant effect of Leader Legitimacy on Formal punishment, $F(1,114) = 9.15$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .074$. Specifically, participants agreed that the transgressive illegitimate leader should be punished more harshly by the group than the transgressive legitimate leader.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics – Means (Standard Deviations) – per condition (Study 1).*

| | National Identification | Perceived Legitimacy (MC) | Group Threat | Formal Punishment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legitimate | 5.61 (1.12) | 4.03 (1.24) | 4.23 (1.44) | 3.57 (1.29) |
| Illegitimate | 5.72 (1.05) | 2.55 (1.16) | 5.29 (1.19) | 4.30 (1.31) |
| All conditions (Total) | 5.67 (1.08) | 3.31 (1.41) | 4.74 (1.42) | 3.93 (1.34) |

*Note*. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

### 3.1.3 Discussion

Results support the hypothesis that group members may only accept transgressions from *legitimate* ingroup leaders. Indeed, group members perceive transgressive *illegitimate* leaders to be more threatening to the group and agree more with the implementation of formal punishment measures towards such leaders. These results extend previous evidence by showing that perceived leader's (il)legitimacy is a significant determinant of follower reactions to leaders who engage in transgression. Thus, it is possible that transgressions committed by legitimate leaders are more validated by followers. I will test this in Study 2. Furthermore, considering the potential threat that transgressive illegitimate leaders pose to followers, I am also interested in exploring how far the group is willing to go to remove these leaders from power. In this sense, I explore the group's willingness to engage in collective punitive measures in the following studies.

## 3.2 Study 2

Study 1 showed that followers warrant formal social control towards transgressive illegitimate leaders, as these leaders are perceived as more threatening to the group than legitimate ones. However, it is possible that participants might have assumed that the leader would go unpunished for their transgressions, which could be (at least partly) responsible for the observed feelings of threat and need for punishment. Therefore, in Study 2, I address this possibility by examining whether the absence (*vs.* presence) of social control over the transgressive leader moderates the effects of leader illegitimacy on the intent to punish the transgressive leader. An important test to determine whether the acceptance of transgressive legitimate leaders is driven by legitimacy is to consider whether groups will still accept those leaders' transgressions in the absence of social control – that is, in threatening situations in which clear group mechanisms to punish a leader's transgressions are absent. If, as hypothesised, legitimate leaders are given transgression credit *because* they have gained legitimacy, then one would expect this effect to happen *even* when social control is absent.

Complementary, I further investigate the differential effect that legitimacy has on group reactions towards transgressive leaders, by measuring validation of the leader's behaviour, negative emotions (i.e. anger and shame), and collective protest. Overall, I test the idea that transgressive illegitimate leaders are perceived as more threatening and raise more negative emotions among followers than legitimate leaders do, which, in turn, can trigger collective protest from group members to remove such leaders from power. As previously reviewed in the literature (Chapter I), when the group perceives a salient threat to the image of the group, it may elicit negative emotional responses (e.g., Levin, Pratto, Matthews, Sidanius, & Kteily, 2013), such as anger (Smith & Kessler, 2004; van Zomeren et al., 2004) and shame (Lickel et al., 2005). These (negative) emotions are known to be strong predictors of engagement in nonnormative collective actions (Lickel et al., 2005; van Zomeren et al.,

2004). Such emotions may eventually become a 'motor' for informal social control, thus mobilizing members to sanction the associated behaviour (Chekroun & Nugier, 2011). In this sense, I believe that the negative emotions triggered by the threat of an illegitimate leader will predict collective protest. As such, I test the role of threat and negative emotions as mediators (in sequence) of the relationship between leader legitimacy and collective protest.

### 3.2.1 Method

**Participants and design**. A sample of US citizens ($N$ = 192, 71 men, 120 women, and 1 did not report gender), aged from 19 to 75 years old ($M$ = 38.77; $SD$ = 12.41) participated in this study via Amazon Mechanical Turk. A Post hoc power analysis with $\alpha$ = .05 revealed that this sample size afforded approximately 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r$ = .25 (G*Power; Faul et al., 2007) for the main effects and interactions between leader legitimacy and social control on the dependent variables. The experiment was a 2 (Leader Legitimacy: Legitimate vs. Illegitimate) X 2 (Social Control: Present vs. Absent) between-participants design.

**Procedure**. Similar to Study 1, I first measured National identification, followed by a scenario of a transgressive leader, which included the Leader Legitimacy and Social Control manipulations, both presented through pieces of (fictitious) news, and finally followed by all the dependent measures. Participants read about Senator Michael Jones who led the US representatives on the International Health Committee, an organization dedicated to discuss, improve and find solutions to health issues, comprising of over 150 countries. This committee sets guidelines regarding health policies which, in turn, would affect the existing health systems in each country (e.g. the Health Care in the USA). As such, each country selected their own subcommittee to lead and represented their respective countries.

***Leader Legitimacy manipulation***. The Leader Legitimacy manipulation was similar to the previous study, though now adapted to this US context. In the Legitimate condition,

participants learned that Senator Michael Jones was recently elected by absolute majority as the US's leading representative of the International Health Committee. Moreover, participants also read from several co-workers and staff members from the Committee working under Senator Jones that they held him in high regard and had high expectations for his performance. Some of the comments from co-workers were: *Michael Jones was a great bet on our part"* and *"He has shown to be very successful on his past work, so we truly believe in him".* Furthermore, a recent poll involving UK citizens included comments like: *"He earned our trust (...) Senator Jones seems to make understandable and reasonable decisions"* and *"We give him credibility due to his past, and we know we can count on him".* In the Illegitimate condition, participants learned that Senator Michael Jones was recently appointed by the government as the US's leading representative of the International Health Committee, and that several co-workers and staff members from the Committee working under Senator Jones did not hold him in high regard and had low expectations for his performance. Specific comments included: *"Michael Jones was a terrible bet on our part"* and *"He has shown to be very unsuccessful on his past work, so we do not believe in him at all".* Furthermore, a recent poll involving US citizens included comments like: *"He did not earn our trust (...) Senator Jones seems to make incomprehensible and* unreasonable decisions" and *"We do not give him credibility due to his past, and we know we cannot count on him".*

***Leader Transgression.*** The Leader Transgression manipulation was similar to the previous study, though now adapted to this US context. Following the Leader Legitimacy manipulation, participants learned that Senator Jones had taken some 'unconventional measures' during his mandate. In particular, there were reports stating that he had been ignoring some safety measures in US hospitals as he considered them as 'minor problems'. Also, he provided a report to the Government to support their proposed changes to the pay and support of hospital work. The report stated that to ensure the provision of health services

for longer hours, in a cost saving way, changes needed to be made to all hospital worker contracts, while also increasing the number of work hours, yet reducing the provision of their overtime pay.

***Social Control manipulation***. After reading the Leader Legitimacy manipulation, and learning about the leader's transgression, participants read a second piece of the newspaper manipulating the presence (or absence) of effective social control mechanisms. This piece stated, for all participants, that Senator Jones had been under investigation by the Attorney-General due to the 'administrative decisions' recently adopted by the Senator, speculated as a misuse of public funds. In the Present condition, the piece also referred that after an initial investigation, the Attorney-General stated that "This case is already brought to trial, and the Senator will be prosecuted and judged according to the law", while in the Absent condition, the Attorney-General referred that "The Senator will not be prosecuted and brought to court, and the case will be dismissed".

**Control measures / Manipulation checks.**

***National identification***. National identification was measured by the following items (adapted from Abrams et al., 1998) (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "Being a US citizen is important to define who I am"; (2) "US citizens are valuable people"; (3) "I am glad to have been born in the USA"; (4) "I am proud to be a US citizen". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

***Perceived legitimacy (Manipulation check)***. Participants were asked to judge leader legitimacy by indicating their opinion/impression regarding Senator Jones as a leader for the Health care system in the US on four bipolar items: (*1 = Untrustworthy, Illegitimate, Not*

*credible, Not Acknowledged; 7 = Trustworthy, Legitimate, Credible, and Acknowledged*). A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .98).

***Perceived effectiveness of social control (Manipulation check).*** Participants answered three items (adapted from Pinto, Marques, & Paez, 2016) to check their perception regarding the group's effectiveness in dealing with the transgressive leader (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "I believe in the efficacy of the Attorney General to deal with this case"; (2) "The Attorney General's decision in dealing with this decision was fair and appropriate"; (3) "The course of action taken by the Attorney General was responsible and in compliance with its duties". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .97).

**Dependent Measures**

***Group threat.*** Participants gave their opinion about the threatening character of the transgressive leader to the group in three items (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "This individual jeopardizes the USA"; (2) "These situations threaten the image of the USA"; (3) "The content of this news report undermines my confidence in the USA's political system". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .82).

***Formal punishment***. Participants gave their agreement on several possible punitive reactions that the group could implement towards the target (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "Senator Jones should keep his job as the US's leading representative indefinitely" (reversed); (2) "The responsible authorities should conduct an inquiry to the Senator Jones's actions while our representative"; (3) "The responsible authorities should initiate disciplinary proceedings against Senator Jones"; (4) "Senator Jones should be demoted from the international committee, though still allowed to work as a member of the staff"; (5) "Senator Jones should be removed from the international committee"; (6) "The responsible authorities should open a criminal case against Senator Jones". A Principal

Components Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation showed that the six items saturated on a single factor explaining 53.63% of variance. A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

***Validation of leader's behaviour***. In order to assess tolerance regarding the leader's misconduct, participants indicated how much they validated the leader's behaviour in four bipolar traits: *1 = Unnecessary, Not valid, Unacceptable and Unjustifiable; 7 = Necessary, Very valid, Acceptable and Justifiable* (based on Vala, Drozda-Senkowska, Oberlé, Lopes, & Silva, 2011). I used a mean score of the items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$).

***Negative emotions***. Participants were asked to indicate how much anger and shame they felt regarding the transgressive leader (*1 = None; 7 = A lot of*). A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

***Collective protest***. Finally, participants indicated their agreement (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*) with four items measuring punitive collective protest towards the leader: (1) "Help organize a petition to limit Senator Jones' decisive power within the Committee"; (2) "Participate in raising our collective voice demanding Senator Jones to be fired from the Committee"; (3) "Participate in an organized rally to force Senator Jones to be removed from office"; (4) "I would campaign on social media to raise awareness regarding Senator Jones' transgressions". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). These measures were inspired and developed to be consistent with the process of collective protest action (based on Machado, Scartascini, & Tommasi, 2011).

### 3.2.2 Results

Results were analysed with a Leader Legitimacy x Social Control ANOVA on all the dependent measures. Table 3 and Table 4 provide descriptive statistics and correlations for measures in Study 2.

**Control measures / Manipulation checks.**

***National identification***. Participants were on average highly identified with the ingroup ($M$ = 5.72; $SD$ = 1.17), and this mean was higher than the mid-point of the scale (4), $t(191) = 20.39$, $p < .001$. There were no differences in terms of national identification between experimental conditions, all $Fs(1,188) \leq 1$, $p \geq .342$.

***Perceived legitimacy***. There was a significant main effect of Leader Legitimacy, where participants perceived greater legitimacy in the Legitimate condition, than in the Illegitimate condition, $F(1,188) = 405.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .683$. Thus, the Leader Legitimacy manipulation was effective. As expected, there was no effect of Social Control, $F(1,188) = 2.55$ $p = .112$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$, or interaction, $F(1,188) < 1$.

***Perceived effectiveness of social control.*** Participants perceived formal social control mechanisms as more responsive to the leader's transgressive behaviour in the Present condition than in the Absent condition, $F(1,188) = 90.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .326$. Thus, the Social Control manipulation was effective. I found no effect of Leader Legitimacy, $F(1,188) = 2.54$, $p = .112$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$, but I found a significant interaction, $F(1,188) = 11.11$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .056$. Participants perceived the social control to be significantly less effective in the Illegitimate-Absent condition, as compared to the Legitimate-Absent one, $t(96) = 3.24$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.66$, 95% CI = [-0.40, 1.65] (see Table 4 for means). Although unexpected, these findings may suggest that participants' views on the ineffectiveness of the social control mechanisms may have also been influenced by the leader's legitimacy.

Table 3. *Correlations between variables (Study 2).*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Leader Legitimacy | – | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Social Control | -.012 | – | | | | | | | |
| 3. National Identification | .048 | -.072 | – | | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived Legitimacy | -.825*** | .074 | -.001 | – | | | | | |
| 5. Perceived Effectiveness Of SC | -.104 | .551*** | .150 | .173* | – | | | | |
| 6. Group Threat | .276*** | .031 | -.020 | -.243** | -.243** | – | | | |
| 7. Formal Punishment | .262*** | .081 | .016 | -.305*** | -.148* | .672*** | – | | |
| 8. Validation of Leader's Behaviour | -.205** | .003 | .006 | .319*** | .236** | -.503*** | -.645*** | – | |
| 9. Negative Emotions | .303*** | .062 | -.012 | -.295*** | -.184* | .668*** | .600*** | -.433*** | – |
| 10. Collective Protest | .193** | .009 | -.021 | -.225** | -.152* | .476*** | .495*** | -.295*** | .555*** |

*Note*. Leader Legitimacy coded: Legitimate = -1; Illegitimate = 1; Social Control coded: Absent = -1; Present = 1;

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

**Dependent measures**

***Group threat.*** As predicted, the analysis of variance showed a significant effect of Leader Legitimacy, indicating that participants perceived the illegitimate transgressive leader to be more threatening to the group than the legitimate transgressive leader, $F(1,188) = 15.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .076$. There was no significant effect of Social Control or interaction, $Fs(1,188) \leq 1$.

***Formal punishment***. As predicted, participants agreed that the transgressive illegitimate leader should be punished more severely than the transgressive legitimate leader, $F(1,188) = 13.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .069$. There was no significant effect of Social Control, $F(1,188) = 1.24$, $p = .268$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$, or interaction, $F(1,188) = 2.72$, $p = .101$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$.

***Validation of leader's behaviour.*** As predicted, participants perceived the leader's behaviour as more valid when the transgressive leader was legitimate than when he was illegitimate, $F(1,188) = 8.14$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .041$. There was no effect of Social Control, $F < 1$, or interaction, $F(1,188) = 1.40$, $p = .239$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$.

***Negative emotions.*** As predicted, participants reported significantly more anger and shame when the transgressive leader was perceived as illegitimate as opposed to legitimate, $F(1,188) = 19.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .092$. There was no significant effect of Social Control, $F < 1$, or interaction, $F(1,188) = 1.98$, $p = .161$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$.

***Collective protest***. As predicted, participants agreed more with collective protest in the Illegitimate condition, than in the Legitimate condition, $F(1,188) = 7.64$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .039$. There was no significant effect of Social Control or interaction, $Fs(1,188) < 1$.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics – Means (Standard Deviations) – per condition (Study 2).*

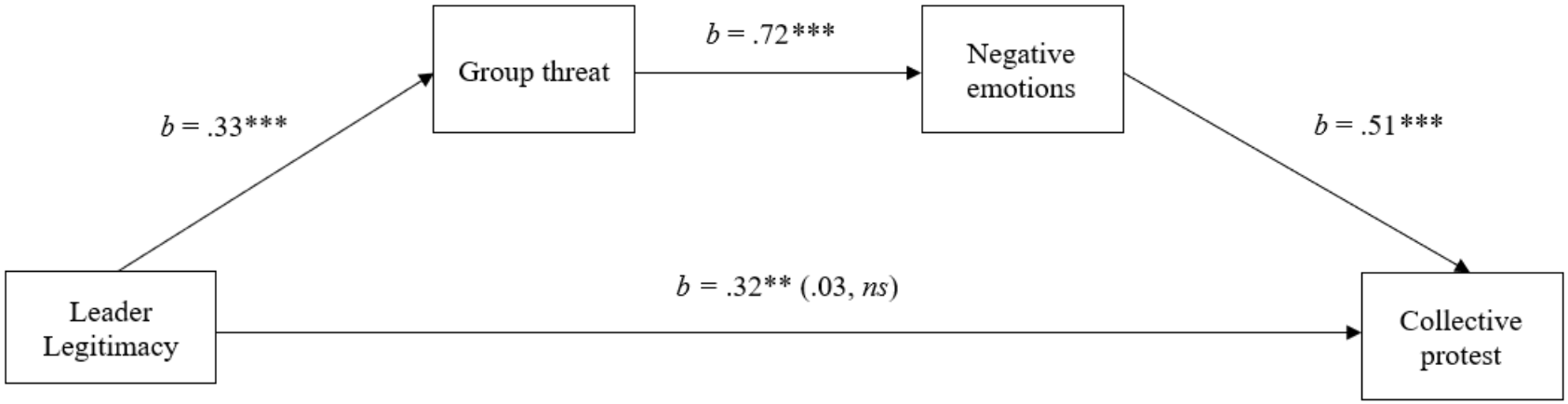
| | National Identification | Perceived Legitimacy (MC) | Perceived Effectiveness of SC (MC) | Group Threat | Formal Punishment | Validation of Leader's Behaviour | Negative Emotions | Collective Protest |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legitimate X Absent | 5.80 (1.18) | 5.67 (1.17) | 3.86 (1.59) | 4.69 (1.32) | 4.77 (1.16) | 3.01 (1.53) | 4.60 (1.39) | 3.99 (1.63) |
| Legitimate X Present | 5.53 (1.18) | 5.86 (1.19) | 5.15 (1.39) | 4.93 (1.20) | 5.24 (1.24) | 2.77 (1.65) | 5.03 (1.42) | 3.86 (1.61) |
| Illegitimate X Absent | 5.80 (1.17) | 2.10 (1.04) | 2.84 (1.54) | 5.52 (1.18) | 5.68 (1.24) | 2.14 (1.31) | 5.69 (1.24) | 4.46 (1.78) |
| Illegitimate X Present | 5.75 (1.15) | 2.46 (1.39) | 5.52 (1.18) | 5.43 (0.92) | 5.59 (0.97) | 2.41 (1.45) | 5.59 (1.13) | 4.68 (1.45) |
| Legitimate (Total) | 5.66 (1.18) | 5.76 (1.18) | 4.50 (1.62) | 4.81 (1.26) | 5.00 (1.22) | 2.89 (1.59) | 4.81 (1.42) | 3.92 (1.62) |
| Illegitimate (Total) | 5.77 (1.15) | 2.27 (1.23) | 4.13 (1.92) | 5.48 (1.06) | 5.63 (1.11) | 2.27 (1.38) | 5.64 (1.18) | 4.57 (1.63) |
| Absent (Total) | 5.80 (1.17) | 3.96 (2.11) | 3.37 (1.64) | 5.09 (1.31) | 5.21 (1.28) | 2.59 (1.49) | 5.12 (1.42) | 4.21 (1.72) |
| Present (Total) | 5.63 (1.16) | 4.27 (2.13) | 5.32 (1.30) | 5.17 (1.10) | 5.40 (1.13) | 2.60 (1.56) | 5.29 (1.32) | 4.24 (1.58) |
| All conditions (Total) | 5.72 (1.17) | 4.11 (2.12) | 4.33 (1.77) | 5.13 (1.21) | 5.30 (1.21) | 2.60 (1.52) | 5.21 (1.37) | 4.23 (1.65) |

*Note*. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

**Mediation Analysis.**

Considering that Social Control did not show a main effect or significant correlations with the dependent variables ($r \leq .062$, $p \geq .392$), I proceeded with our hypothesized mediation analysis. As such, I tested a sequential mediation model in which Leader Legitimacy (Legitimate = -1 and Illegitimate = 1) is associated with higher levels of Group threat, which in turn is associated with Negative emotions and, finally, with agreement with Collective protest. The Pearson's product-moment correlations between all measures were all significant ($r \geq .196$, $p \leq .006$). I proceeded to a sequential mediation analysis (Model 6, with 10,000 bootstraps; see Hayes, 2013) to test our prediction (see Figure 1). The total model significantly explained Collective protest, $F(3, 188) = 30.60$, $p < .001$, accounting for 32.81% of the variance. In line with my prediction, Group threat and Negative emotions significantly sequentially mediated the association between Leader Legitimacy and Collective protest: total indirect effect: $b = 0.30$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI = [0.16, 0.45]; total effect: $b = 0.32$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 2.76$, $p = .006$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.55]; direct effect: $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 0.25$, $p = .806$, 95% CI = [-0.18, 0.23]. In sum, the model shows that participants perceived the transgressive illegitimate leader as more threatening, and the more threatening the leader was perceived to be, the more anger and shame participants felt and, consequently, the stronger agreement with collective protest towards the leader. Conversely, the legitimate leader triggered less group threat, which was associated with less anger and shame, which in turn were associated with less willingness to engage in collective protest towards the legitimate leader.

*Figure 1.* The mediating effect of Group threat and Negative emotions on the association between Leader Legitimacy and Collective protest (Study 2).




*Note.* Leader Legitimacy coded: Legitimate = -1; Illegitimate = 1.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

### 3.2.3 Discussion

Overall, Study 2 provides further support to the idea that a leader's perceived (il)legitimacy determines how threatening the group perceives the leader's transgression to be, and, consequently, the extent to which participants agree with the implementation of formal punitive measures. Study 2 also extends previous findings, by showing that illegitimate leaders obtain less validation from group members, trigger more negative emotions and higher agreement with collective protest, compared to a transgressive legitimate leader. In sum, Study 2 found that only legitimate leaders are awarded transgression credit, and that they gather more validation for their decisions than illegitimate leaders do. Moreover, results also show that anger and shame (triggered by the threat posed by a transgressive illegitimate leader) are associated with increased willingness to engage in punitive collective protest aiming at removing the transgressive leader from the leadership role. In contrast, transgressive legitimate leaders were perceived as less threatening to the group, which resulted in a lower negative emotional state, and a relatively tolerant response from the group.

Additionally, Study 2 also tested the idea that participants might view the group's social control inaction towards a transgressive leader as an acceptable reaction, if they perceive such leader as legitimate. In this sense, I found that legitimate leaders that engaged in transgressive behaviour still benefit from transgression credit, even when it became clear that such leaders would not suffer consequences for their misconduct. Indeed, even in the absence of formal social control mechanisms, followers reacted more favourably towards transgressive legitimate leaders, compared to illegitimate leaders. Interestingly, I observed that in the absence of social control, participants perceived social control as less ineffective in controlling transgressive behaviour from legitimate leaders, compared to illegitimate ones. This finding could be partly accounted by the influence that leader legitimacy can have on

people's perceptions, and it might potentially explain why people at times seem indifferent towards transgressive leaders who go unpunished. However, this interaction from the control measure may also raise questions regarding the observed null effects of Social Control in the dependent measures. It could be that there might be some confounding between both factors, or that the Social Control manipulation was not perceived as meaningful to participants in comparison to the Leader Legitimacy manipulation. Future research may need to disentangle each factor and further investigate the potential impact of the absence of social control exerted upon transgressive leaders.

### 3.3 Study 3

Study 2 showed that informal forms of collective punishment – generally fuelled by the threat to the group caused by ingroup transgressions (Chekroun & Nugier, 2011) – were only observed towards illegitimate leaders. Considering that legitimate leaders' power over followers is seen as both deserved and justified (Caddick, 1982; Tyler, 2006), and therefore validated and acknowledged by group members, the group may believe that such leaders are more likely to successfully steer the group. Parallel research on the social identity approach to leadership (e.g., Hogg, 2001) shows that groups tend to conform to the group prototype, and consequently invest in the most prototypical member (Giessner, van Knippenberg, & Sleebos, 2009; Hogg, 2001; Hogg et al., 1998; Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001). Based on the assumptions of social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001), it might be argued that group members consider prototypical leaders as legitimate (Hogg & Reid, 2001), sharing a frame of reference for leader evaluation (van Dijke & de Cremer, 2008). Therefore, in Study 3, I address the interaction (and potential confound) between these two theoretical concepts – leader legitimacy and leader prototypicality. Specifically, I test whether (1) leader legitimacy leads group members to accept transgressive leaders irrespective of how prototypical they

are, or (2) whether leader prototypicality and legitimacy have additive or interactive effects in explaining reactions to transgressive leadership.

### 3.3.1 Method

**Participants and design**. A sample of British citizens ($N$ = 203, including 91 men, 109 women, 2 other, and 1 not reported), aged from 18 to 66 years old ($M$ = 24.30; $SD$ = 7.87) participated in this study via the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. A Post hoc power analysis with $\alpha = .05$ revealed that this sample size afforded approximately 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r = .25$ (G*Power; Faul et al., 2007) for the main effects and interactions between leader legitimacy and leader prototypicality on the dependent variables. The experiment was a 2 (Leader Legitimacy: Legitimate vs. Illegitimate) x 2 (Leader Prototypicality: Prototypical vs. Non-Prototypical) between-participants design.

**Procedure**. Similar to the previous studies, I first measured National identification, followed by a scenario of a transgressive leader, which included the Leader Legitimacy and Leader Prototypicality manipulations, both presented through pieces of (fictitious) news. The order of both manipulations was counterbalanced to prevent any order effect, followed by all dependent measures. Participants read about Sir Michael James, the UK's leading representative of an international committee with strong implications on the National Health Service. The Leader Legitimacy manipulation and Leader Transgression induction were similar to Study 2, adapted to the NHS in the UK context.

***Leader Prototypicality manipulation***. Leader Prototypicality was manipulated with a two-dimensional normative distribution of UK citizens in regard to a personality profile, based on previous prototypicality manipulations (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Dougill, 2002; Leicht, Randsley de Moura, & Crisp, 2014). Participants were presented with a recent (fictitious) poll gathered from a sample of UK citizens, which collected their opinion on *general values* and *identity factors*. The same survey was also applied to the leader, and

participants could observe the comparative results between UK citizens and the leader. In the prototypical condition, the leader was located near the centre of the graph, with an average mean score of 5.5 on both dimensions (1 = low; 10 = high). In the non-prototypical condition, the leader was in a lower spectrum than most other UK citizens, with an average mean score of 3.3 on both dimensions.

**Control measures / Manipulation checks.**

***National identification***. National identification was measured by the following items (adapted from Abrams et al., 1998) (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "Being a UK citizen is important to define who I am"; (2) "UK citizens are valuable people"; (3) "I am glad to have been born in the UK"; (4) "I am proud to be a UK citizen". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

***Perceived legitimacy (Manipulation check)***. Participants were asked to judge leader legitimacy by indicating their opinion/impression regarding Sir James as a leader for the NHS in the UK on four bipolar items: (*1 = Untrustworthy, Illegitimate, Not credible, Not Acknowledged; 7 = Trustworthy, Legitimate, Credible, and Acknowledged*). A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

***Perceived prototypicality (Manipulation check)***. As a manipulation check for the Leader Prototypicality manipulation, we used the 6-item Leader Prototypicality from Platow and van Knippenberg (2001) – "As a leader, would you say that Sir James" (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree): (1) "Represents what is characteristic about UK citizens"; (2) "Is representative of UK citizens"; (3) "Is a good example for UK citizens"; (4) "Stands for what UK citizens have in common"; (5) "Is not representative of UK citizens in general" (reversed); (6) "Is very similar to most people in the UK". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Additionally, to ascertain the distinction between both concepts of Perceived legitimacy and Perceived prototypicality, I conducted a joint Principal Components Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation on both scales, which showed that the ten items saturated on two separate factors respectively to each scale (40.96% and 35.13% of variance).

**Dependent Measures**

***Group threat.*** Participants gave their opinion about the threatening character of the transgressive leader to the group in three items (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "This individual jeopardizes the country"; (2) "Situations like these threaten our country's image"; (3) "The content of this news report undermines my confidence in the UK's political system.". A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

***Formal punishment***. Participants gave their agreement on several possible punitive reactions that the group could implement towards the target (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*): (1) "Sir James should keep his job as the UK's leading representative indefinitely" (reversed); (2) "The responsible authorities should conduct an inquiry to the Sir James's actions while our representative"; (3) "The responsible authorities should initiate disciplinary proceedings against Sir James"; (4) "Sir James should be demoted from the international committee, though still allowed to work as a member of the staff"; (5) "Sir James should be removed from the international committee"; (6) "The responsible authorities should open a criminal case against Sir James". A Principal Components Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation showed that the six items saturated on a single factor explaining 53.63% of variance. A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$).

***Validation of leader's behaviour***. In order to assess tolerance regarding the leader's misconduct, participants indicated how much they validated the leader's behaviour in four bipolar traits: *1 = Unnecessary, Not valid, Unacceptable and Unjustifiable; 7 = Necessary,*

*Very valid, Acceptable and Justifiable* (based on Vala et al., 2011). A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .91).

***Negative emotions***. We asked participants to indicate how much anger and shame they felt regarding the transgressive leader (*1 = None; 7 = A lot of*). A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .74).

***Collective protest***. Finally, participants indicated their agreement (*1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree*) with three items measuring punitive collective protest towards the leader: (1) "Help organize a petition to limit Sir James' decisive power within the Committee"; (2) "Participate in raising our collective voice demanding Sir James to be fired from the Committee"; (3) "Participate in an organized strike to force Sir James to be removed from the Committee. A mean score of the items was used (Cronbach's α = .87). These measures were inspired and developed to be consistent with the process of collective protest action (based on Machado et al., 2011).

### 3.3.2 Results

Table 5 and Table 6 provide descriptive statistics and correlations for measures in Study 3.

**Control measures / Manipulation checks.**

***National identification***. Participants were on average highly identified with the ingroup ($M$ = 5.07; $SD$ = 1.09), and this mean was higher than the mid-point of the scale (4), $t(202) = 13.99$, $p < .001$. There were no a priori differences in terms of national identification between experimental conditions, all $Fs(1,199) \leq 1$.

***Perceived legitimacy***. Participants perceived greater legitimacy in the Legitimate condition than in the Illegitimate condition, $F(1, 199) = 439.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .654$. Thus, the Leader Legitimacy manipulation was effective. There was no effect of Leader Prototypicality or interaction, all $Fs(1,199) < 1$.

***Perceived prototypicality***. As predicted, participants perceived greater perceived prototypicality in the Prototypical condition than in the Non-Prototypical condition, $F(1, 199) = 32.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .141$. Thus, the Leader Prototypicality manipulation was effective. There was no effect of Leader Legitimacy or interaction, all *Fs* $(1,199) \leq 3.23$, $p \geq .074$, indicating that both factors are distinct.

**Dependent measures**

***Group threat.*** As predicted, participants perceived the transgressive illegitimate leader to be more threatening to the group than the transgressive legitimate leader, $F(1,199) = 15.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .071$. There was no significant effect of Leader Prototypicality, $F(1,199) = 2.33$, $p = .129$, or interaction, $F(1,199) = 1.53$, $p = .217$.

Table 5. *Correlations between variables (Study 3).*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Leader Legitimacy | – | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Leader Prototypicality | -.103 | – | | | | | | | |
| 3. National Identification | .008 | -.005 | – | | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived Legitimacy (MC) | -.809*** | .050 | .005 | – | | | | | |
| 5. Perceived Prototypicality (MC) | -080 | -.365*** | .307*** | .184** | – | | | | |
| 6. Group Threat | .257*** | .076 | .014 | -.209** | -.187** | – | | | |
| 7. Formal Punishment | -.339*** | .016 | .091 | .411*** | .268*** | -.581*** | – | | |
| 8. Validation of Leader's Behaviour | .311*** | .053 | -.028 | -.350*** | -.281*** | .576*** | -.537*** | – | |
| 9. Negative Emotions | .270*** | -.009 | -.002 | -.268*** | -.221** | .579*** | -.566*** | .554*** | – |
| 10. Collective Protest | .270*** | .024 | -.105 | -.287*** | -.317*** | .491*** | -.453*** | .639*** | .572*** |

*Note*. Leader Legitimacy coded: Legitimate = -1; Illegitimate = 1; Leader Prototypicality coded: Prototypical = -1; Non-Prototypical = 1;

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

***Formal punishment***. As predicted, participants agreed that the transgressive illegitimate leader should be punished more severely than the legitimate one, $F(1,199) = 22.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .101$. There was no effect of Leader Prototypicality, $F(1,199) = 1.61$, $p = .206$, or interaction, $Fs(1,199) < 1$.

***Validation of leader's behaviour.*** As predicted, participants perceived the leader's behaviour as more valid when the transgressive leader was legitimate than when he was illegitimate, $F(1,199) = 25.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .114$. There was no effect of Leader Prototypicality, or interaction, $Fs(1,199) < 1$.

***Negative emotions.*** As predicted, participants felt more anger and shame in the Illegitimate condition than in the Legitimate condition, $F(1,199) = 15.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .073$. We found no effect of Leader Prototypicality, or interaction, $Fs(1,199) < 1$.

***Collective protest***. As predicted, participants agreed more with collective protest in the Illegitimate condition than in the Legitimate condition, $F(1,199) = 16.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .076$. There was no effect of Leader Prototypicality, or interaction, $Fs(1,199) < 1$.

Table 6. *Descriptive statistics – Means (Standard Deviations) – per condition (Study 3).*

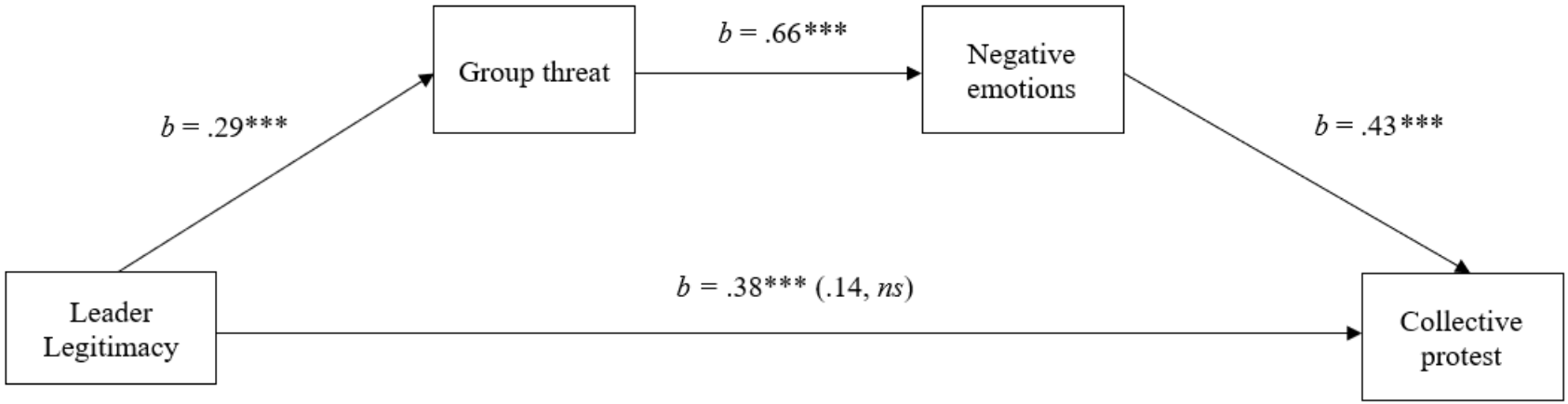
| | National Identification | Perceived Legitimacy (MC) | Perceived Prototypicality (MC) | Group Threat | Formal Punishment | Validation of Leader's Behaviour | Negative Emotions | Collective Protest |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legitimate X Prototypical | 4.99 (1.20) | 5.82 (1.01) | 4.78 (1.15) | 4.39 (1.32) | 4.11 (0.82) | 3.58 (1.24) | 4.09 (1.19) | 3.70 (1.20) |
| Legitimate X Non-Prototypical | 5.13 (0.91) | 5.56 (1.22) | 3.82 (1.17) | 4.81 (0.86) | 4.27 (0.78) | 3.37 (1.13) | 4.21 (1.21) | 3.73 (1.40) |
| Illegitimate X Prototypical | 5.15 (1.13) | 2.73 (0.96) | 4.47 (1.27) | 5.18 (1.15) | 4.65 (0.72) | 2.56 (1.25) | 4.90 (1.42) | 4.37 (1.45) |
| Illegitimate X Non-Prototypical | 4.99 (1.16) | 2.73 (1.12) | 3.53 (1.07) | 5.22 (0.95) | 4.77 (0.84) | 2.68 (1.12) | 4.88 (1.42) | 4.63 (1.39) |
| Legitimate (Total) | 5.07 (1.05) | 5.68 (1.13) | 4.26 (1.25) | 4.62 (1.11) | 4.19 (0.79) | 3.47 (1.18) | 4.16 (1.20) | 3.72 (1.31) |
| Illegitimate (Total) | 5.08 (1.14) | 2.73 (1.03) | 4.06 (1.27) | 5.20 (1.07) | 4.70 (0.77) | 2.62 (1.19) | 4.89 (1.41) | 4.48 (1.42) |
| Prototypical (Total) | 5.08 (1.16) | 4.09 (1.82) | 4.61 (1.22) | 4.83 (1.29) | 4.41 (0.91) | 3.01 (1.34) | 4.54 (1.38) | 4.07 (1.38) |
| Non-Prototypical (Total) | 5.07 (1.03) | 4.28 (1.84) | 3.69 (1.13) | 5.00 (0.92) | 4.49 (0.84) | 3.06 (1.17) | 4.52 (1.34) | 4.14 (1.46) |
| All conditions (Total) | 5.07 (1.09) | 4.18 (1.83) | 4.16 (1.26) | 4.91 (1.13) | 4.45 (0.82) | 3.03 (1.26) | 4.53 (1.36) | 4.11 (1.42) |

*Note*. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

***Mediation Analysis.***

The analyses did not reveal a significant effect of the manipulation of Leader Prototypicality nor it correlated significantly with negative emotions ($r$ = -.009, $p$ = .903) or collective protest ($r$ = .024, $p$ = .734). This suggests that leader legitimacy holds its unique influence on group reactions towards transgressive leaders and, more importantly, allows us to proceed with our hypothesized mediation analysis. I conducted a sequential mediation analysis (Model 6, with 10,000 bootstrap samples, similar to the previous study) to test my prediction with Leader Legitimacy as the predictor, Group threat as the first mediator, Negative emotions as the second mediator, and Collective protest as the final outcome (see Figure 2). The model significantly explained Collective protest, $F$ (3, 199) = 51.96, $p$ < .001 and accounted for 37.48% of the variance. In line with my prediction, Group threat and Negative emotions significantly sequentially mediated the association between Leader Legitimacy and Collective protest: total indirect effect: $b$ = 0.24, $SE$ = 0.06, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.36]; total effect: $b$ = 0.38, $SE$ = 0.10, $t$ = 3.97, $p$ < .001, 95% CI = [0.19, 0.57]; direct effect: $b$ = 0.14, $SE$ = 0.08, $t$ = 1.70, $p$ = .091, 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.30]. Therefore, participants associated higher levels of group threat to the transgressive illegitimate leader, and the higher the perceived threat, the stronger the feelings of anger and shame, resulting in higher agreement with collective protest towards the leader. Conversely, the legitimate leader (vs. illegitimate leader) triggered less group threat, which in turn was associated with lower feelings of anger and shame and, consequently, with less agreement to engage in collective protest.

*Figure 2.* The mediating effect of Group threat and Negative emotions on the association between Leader Legitimacy and Collective protest (Study 3).




*Note*. Leader Legitimacy coded: Legitimate = -1; Illegitimate = 1.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

### 3.3.3 Discussion

Study 3 further increases confidence in the reliability and validity of the previous results: Legitimate leaders that engaged in transgressive behaviour benefited from a transgression credit, even when they were non-prototypical. Furthermore, results replicated the previous mediation process, demonstrating that a leader's legitimacy is an important criterion that determines how threatening a transgressive leader might be for the group. In turn, the higher the perceived threat, the higher anger and shame group members feel towards such situations, which propels them towards punitive action to control (or remove) such leaders from power.

Moreover, results show that Leader Legitimacy had an independent significant effect on reactions to transgressive leaders in this study and did not interact with Leader Prototypicality on any of the dependent measures. In fact, Leader Prototypicality did not play a moderation role on the process between leader legitimacy and collective protest. These findings highlight the importance of leader legitimacy as a relevant construct to account for leaders' transgression tolerance, and support our assertion that leader legitimacy exerts independent effects on reactions to transgressive leaders. Overall, these results pave way to support the argument that leader legitimacy is a strong determinant of whether transgressive leaders are awarded transgression credit, and how group members will respond to transgressive group leaders.

## 3.4 General Discussion

Three studies consistently showed that leader legitimacy is key in determining either favourable or unfavourable reactions towards a transgressive leader. A transgressive legitimate leader came across as less threatening to the ingroup and was more tolerated than a transgressive illegitimate leader. Study 1 demonstrated that punitive reactions to transgressive leaders were higher when they were perceived as illegitimate by their followers, as compared

to legitimate leaders. In contrast, the transgressive legitimate leader was perceived as less threatening and raised less agreement with formal punishment measures (transgression credit), than the illegitimate leader. These results clarify the transgression credit given to leaders (Abrams et al., 2013), by showing that legitimate (but not illegitimate) leaders are considered worthy of the 'benefit of the doubt' and forgiven for their transgressive behaviour. Consequently, leader legitimacy allowed for greater transgression because followers abdicated moral authority to their leaders.

Study 2 showed that transgressive illegitimate leaders received less validation for their actions, raised feelings of anger and shame among group members and gathered higher agreement with collective protest. Specifically, the threat caused by illegitimate leaders triggered negative emotions that acted as fuel for collective actions to remove such leaders from their role. Considering the implications of an absence of leadership in groups, it is interesting to find that groups prefer to remove their leader (and become leaderless until a replacement is found), than accepting transgressive illegitimate leadership. On the other hand, initial acknowledgement of leaders acts as a buffer for transgressive behaviour, possibly giving such leaders a high degree of leniency for misconduct (Abrams et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Furthermore, participants' reactions were fundamentally dependent on whether the leader was legitimate or not, even when presented with different outcomes of social control (i.e. the leader was facing punishment or would remain unpunished by authorities). Interestingly, in the absence of social control mechanisms, individuals showed more distrust in the group's social control system when the transgressive leader was perceived as illegitimate. In a sense, once deemed illegitimate, leaders' actions might be more easily perceived as transgressive. Future research could further explore whether people's opinions on the effectiveness of the justice system are influenced by the leader's legitimacy.

Finally, Study 3 demonstrated a consistent and predominant effect of leader legitimacy across all dependent measures. Yet, even though prototypicality is usually hypothesised as necessary for leadership selection (e.g., Hogg & Reid, 2001; Hogg et al., 2012), only null effects between the dependent measures were observed from the leader prototypicality manipulation. Although these null effects do not necessarily rule out the role of prototypicality in leader-follower relations, this study does show that both prototypical and non-prototypical leaders were given transgression credit, when perceived as legitimate by participants. These results suggest that whereas prototypicality is expected to be key for leadership selection, legitimacy can also be an important factor that will determine whether reactions to the transgressive leader will be positive or negative. As such, I offer a theoretical advancement for the understanding of reactions to leadership in group contexts, and posit that legitimacy is an additional factor to be considered in further investigations of the social identity approach to leadership.

### 3.4.1 Theoretical and Applied Implications

Results suggest that group members rely on a leader's (il)legitimacy in order to decide how to interpret the transgression, and consequently, how to react. These data shed light on why some leaders are pressured to resign from their position after their misconducts become public, while others are allowed to remain in office. In fact, these results show that disinvestment from the group (Pinto et al., 2016) may not be the only reaction group members adopt. Alternative responses such as tolerance (and validation/ acceptance) of the transgression behaviour or informal punitive reactions can be implemented towards the transgressors. Future research could consider the impact that these responses have on commitment to the group and on group cohesion.

The current research provides novel insights into the drivers of tolerance for transgressive leaders, but its findings also have important applied implications. Ensuring an

ethical environment is of importance for many organisations and promoting ethical conduct is key to effective corporate governance (Jamali, Safieddine, & Rabbath, 2008). This is especially relevant, given that leaders have a key role in shaping ethical organisational culture (Ciulla, 1998; Freeman, Gilbert, & Hartman, 1988; Treviño, 1990) and are likely to modulate their followers' behaviour (M. E. Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). In fact, these studies suggest that judgements of unethical leaders seem to depend more on how legitimate leaders are perceived to be than their actual behaviour. Indeed, demonstrations across several countries are filled with social frustration towards their countries' leaders; some of them are even violent in requesting for leaders' resignation. The current European socioeconomic crisis weighs heavily on the people, and in many countries, leaders appear to be failing in restoring common well-being. Such failure may deem leaders as illegitimate, for not being competent or motivated enough, by failing to meet the promises made, and therefore, losing credibility among the people. These leaders are ultimately seen through a filter of negative expectations that can easily unchain perceptions that these leaders' behaviours are less valid, while triggering punitive collective attitudes towards them, namely claiming for their removal.

In the present research I used experimental vignettes, as this has been shown to be a valid and appropriate method (e.g., Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), and is a mechanism which allows to test research questions that might pose ethical complexities in typical organisational research methods (e.g. manipulating leader transgression in a real organisational context would not be possible). Furthermore, this research was conducted in 3 different countries (Portugal, UK and USA), and consistently showed the legitimacy effect. Nonetheless, future research could extend the generalizability of these findings using alternative methods (e.g. longitudinal surveys, particularly when considering the role of perceived leader legitimacy as

a predictor of socially relevant outcomes), varied normative contexts and settings (e.g. politics, organisations, sports).

In summary, leader legitimacy seems to be essential to account for reactions to transgressive leaders. Legitimate leaders are given more credit for moral transgressions, in a sense that they earned the right to lead and deserve a 'second chance', where the group seems to enter a validation process of the leader's misconduct. Above all, it seems that a leader's formal role is not the only aspect that defines their power, as leadership seems to be of little use without the group's acknowledgement and validation of the leader's legitimacy.

## Chapter IV: System justification, leader legitimacy, and reactions to controversial leaders[4]

Research has shown that system justifiers tend to perceive less personal discrimination, and feel lower negative emotions (e.g., resentment) towards the system (Olson & Hafer, 2001). In fact, people who are motivated to protect the status quo may attribute the responsibilities of the underlying issues of a country to 'convenient scapegoats', such as immigrants, minorities, and social activists (van der Toorn, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2015; see also Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Lundskow, 2012). In this sense, system justifiers might generally express negative emotions to a lesser extent towards leaders when it comes to potentially unethical behaviour. I expect that this effect should be especially salient when such leaders are perceived as legitimate by their followers. Legitimate leaders should also be tolerated and supported more, and even more likely to see their behaviour replicated by followers. Indeed, there is a tendency for leaders that engage in 'bad' behaviour to encourage similar behaviour in their followers (M. E. Brown et al., 2005; Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012; D. M. Mayer et al., 2009; D. M. Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010), especially when the potential for punishment for engaging in unethical behaviour is absent (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Litzky, Eddleston, & Kidder, 2006; Treviño, 1990). Indeed, unethical behaviour from superiors seems to legitimize transgressions to some extent (Bauman, Tost, & Ong, 2016), possibly prompting followers to engage in similar behaviours (Hoyt et al., 2013). Thus, it is

[4] This chapter is part of a manuscript currently under review: Marques, A. G., Randsley de Moura, G., & Leite, A. C. (under review). "The Role of System Justification and Leader Legitimacy on Reactions to Controversial Leaders.

possible that people who legitimize controversial leaders will also consider their behaviour as less unethical and, consequently, validate their actions. On the other hand, when leaders are perceived to violate core values, they might trigger feelings of threat to the group's identity (Balser & Carmin, 2009). Leaders who are perceived to pose a threat to the group's identity are often depreciated by their group (Abrams, Travaglino, et al., 2014), and potentially eliciting hostile emotions, like anger (Lerner et al., 2003; Sadler et al., 2005) and shame (Lickel et al., 2005). Thus, the role of leader legitimacy seems to be key for our understanding of how individuals respond to controversial leaders based on their perception of justice in the system.

In three studies, I tested the hypotheses that those who more strongly endorsed system justification beliefs would perceive their country's leader (Trump, May, or Johnson respectively) as more legitimate, and in turn, would react less negatively to the leader. Specifically, the more people perceive their leader to be legitimate, the more ethical they should be perceived, and thus, the more validation awarded for the leader's behaviour. In contrast, I posit that the more illegitimate a leader is perceived to be, the more people should perceive the leader as a threat to the country, and in turn, the more negative emotions (i.e. anger and shame) they should feel towards the leader.

## 4.1 Study 4 – US Donald Trump

### 4.1.1 Method

**Procedure and participants**. Participants were asked to complete an online study (a week after the 2016 US elections) via Amazon's Mechanical Turk about American citizens' perceptions regarding current social-political issues in the USA. A sample of 242 US citizens participated in this study (101 men, 140 women, and 1 reported as other gender), aged from 18 to 81 years old ($M$ = 40.11; $SD$ = 16.68). A priori power analysis with $\alpha = .05$ revealed that a minimum sample size of 246 was required to afford 80% power to detect effect sizes of

$r$ = .25 for Structural Equation Modelling (Soper, 2020) with the respective parameters for the hypothesised model of this study.

**Measures.**

***System justification*** was measured with six statements[5] (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .87), from Kay and Jost (2003)'s System Justification scale: (1) "In general, I find society to be fair"; (2) "In general, the American political system operates as it should"; (3) "The United States is the best country in the world to live in"; (4) "Most policies serve the greater good"; (5) "Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness"; (6) "Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve".

***Leader legitimacy*** items were based on attributes typically known to endow leaders with legitimacy, such as trustworthiness, credibility, competence, fairness (e.g., Hollander, 2006; Julian et al., 1969; Ratcliff & Vescio, 2017; Tyler, 2006; Vial et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2010). There were 4 items using bipolar 7-point scales (e.g., "What do you think of Donald Trump as the next leader for the USA", *1 = Untrustworthy, Not credible, Unfair, Incompetent; 7 = Trustworthy, Credible, Fair, Competent*; $\alpha$ = .98).

***Ethical behaviour*** measured how ethical participants perceived Trump's behaviour to be by asking to what extent they thought that Trump's comments and actions were: (*1 = Are totally unethical, Clearly break rules, Clearly demonstrate a lack of integrity; 7 = Are totally ethical, Do not break any rules, Clearly demonstrate integrity*; $\alpha$ = .92).

[5]We removed two statements ("American society needs to be radically restructured" and "Our society is getting worse every year") from this scale, as factorial analysis showed that they saturated out of the main component.

***Validation of behaviour*** was measured by asking how much participants validated Trump's behaviour in four bipolar traits: (*1 = Unnecessary, Not valid, Unacceptable and Unjustifiable; 7 = Necessary, Very valid, Acceptable and Justifiable;* $\alpha = .98$), based on (Vala et al., 2011).

***Group threat*** was measured with three items (*1 = I strongly disagree, 7 = I strongly agree*, $\alpha = .96$): (1) "Trump is harmful to country"; (2) "Trump threatens the image of our country"; (3) "Trump weakens my confidence on the perception of our political system".

***Negative emotions*** were measured by participants indicating how much negative emotions they felt towards Trump in four bipolar items: (*1 = No shame, No disappointment, No anger, No sadness; 7 = Great shame, Great disappointment, Great anger, Great sadness*; $\alpha = .97$).

**4.1.2 Results**

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in this study. I ran a Confirmatory Factor Analyses testing our main measurement model with our six sets of multi-item scales; loading 24 items onto 6 latent factors (6 system justification; 4 leader legitimacy; 3 ethical behaviour; 4 validation of behaviour; 3 group threat; and 4 negative emotions). This model fits the data well: $\chi^2(238) = 428.186$, $\chi^2/df = 1.80$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = .97, TFI = .96, SRMR = .06.

Table 7. *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables (Study 4)*

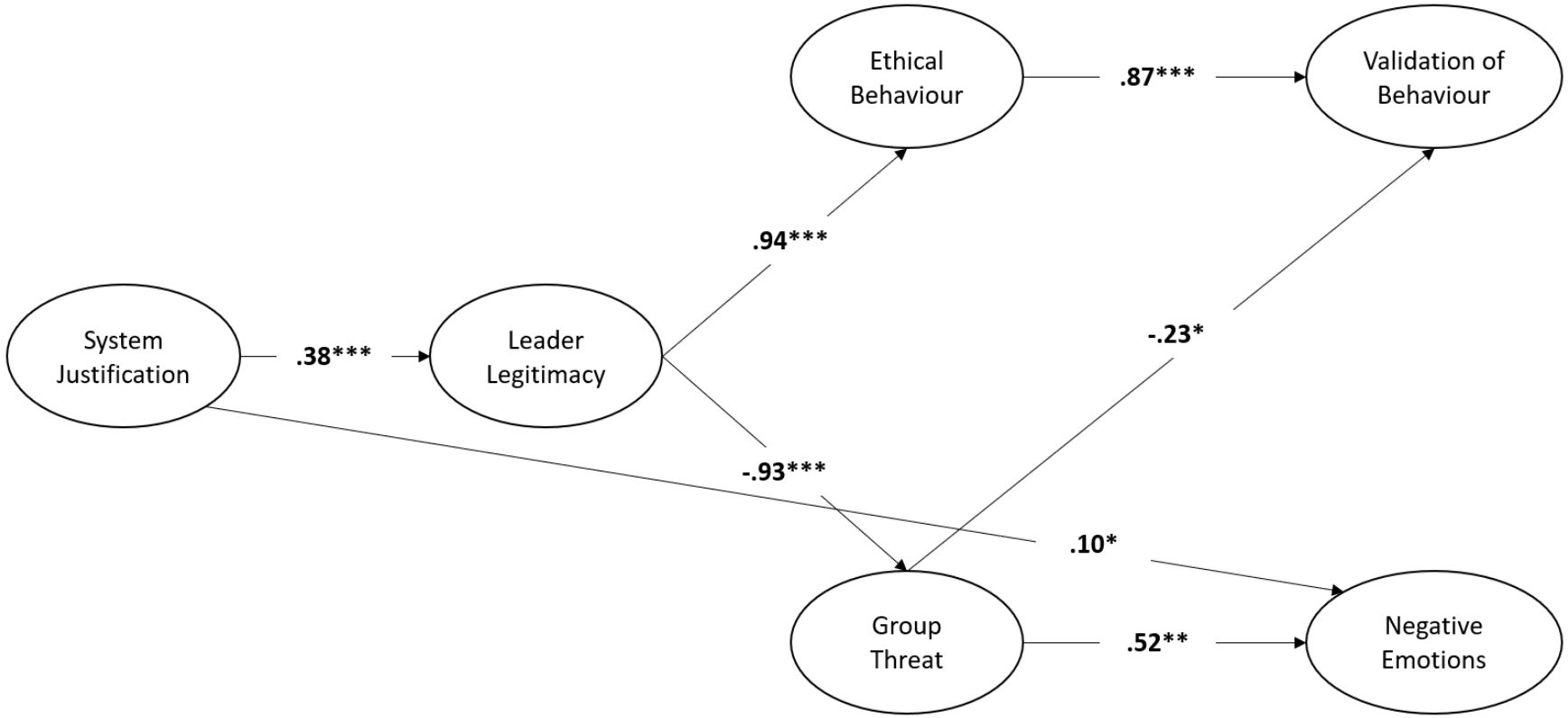
| | *M* (*SD*) | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. System Justification | 3.80 (1.34) | .366*** | .280*** | .306*** | -.353*** | -.247*** |
| 2. Leader Legitimacy | 3.06 (2.13) | – | .864*** | .895*** | -.903*** | -.866*** |
| 3. Ethical Behaviour | 2.83 (2.02) | | – | .920*** | -.822*** | -.809*** |
| 4. Validation of Behaviour | 2.77 (2.22) | | | – | -.862*** | -.830*** |
| 5. Group Threat | 4.90 (2.21) | | | | – | .864*** |
| 6. Negative Emotions | 4.72 (2.33) | | | | | – |

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

I tested my hypothesis using a structural equation model with latent variables on Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2013) with MLR estimation; see Figure 3 (all possible paths included, but only significant paths are presented in the figure; full model results are presented in Table 8). Specifically, first I regressed leader legitimacy onto system justification, and then I created two different pathways depicting opposing reactions towards Trump as a leader. The first one was a 'positive reactions' pathway, where validation of behaviour was regressed onto ethical behaviour, perceived legitimacy, and system justification; ethical behaviour was regressed onto perceived legitimacy, and system justification. The second one was a 'negative reactions' pathway, where negative emotions was regressed onto group threat, leader legitimacy, and system justification; group threat was regressed onto leader legitimacy, and system justification. Additionally, I regressed

validation of behaviour onto group threat; and regressed negative emotions onto ethical behaviour.

*Figure 3.* Associations (standardized estimates) of system justification on differential group reactions, via leader legitimacy (Study 4).




*$p$ < .05, **$p$ < .01, ***$p$ < .001

Consistent with my hypotheses, we observed a significant positive indirect effect between system justification and validation of the leader's behaviour, $\beta$ = 0.31, *SE* = .09, *p* = 0.001, [0.229, 0.483], and significant negative indirect effect between system justification and negative emotions, $\beta$ = -0.18, SE = .07, *p* = 0.011, [-0.324, -0.042]. As expected, results show that system justification was associated with validation of behaviour via leader legitimacy and ethicality in sequence. In other words, the more participants justified the system, the more legitimate they perceived the leader to be, $\beta$ = 0.38 [0.252, 0.510], in turn, the more ethical they perceive the leader, $\beta$ = 0.94 [0.876, 0.994], and in turn the more they validate the leader behaviour, $\beta$ = 0.87 [0.552, 1.194]. Results also show that leader legitimacy was associated with group threat, $\beta$ = -0.93 [-0.979, -0.885], which, in turn, was associated with negative emotions, $\beta$ = 0.52 [0.184, 0.846].

Table 8. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of System justification and Leader legitimacy predicting Ethical behaviour, group threat, Validation of behaviour and Negative emotions (Study 4).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | | 6. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* |
| 1. System Justification | 0.38 [0.252, 0.510] | <.001 | -0.05 [-0.129, 0.039] | .289 | 0.01 [-0.058, 0.068] | .874 | 0.00 [-0.066, 0.060] | .926 | 0.10 [0.023, 0.168] | .010 |
| 2. Leader Legitimacy | / | / | 0.94 [0.876, 0.994] | <.001 | -0.93 [-0.979, -0.885] | <.001 | -0.10 [-0.466, 0.268] | .596 | -0.27 [-0.587, 0.051] | .101 |
| 3. Ethical Behaviour | | | / | / | / | / | 0.87 [0.552, 1.194] | <.001 | -0.19 [-0.401, 0.015] | .069 |
| 4. Group Threat | | | | | | | -0.23 [-0.411, -0.043] | .015 | 0.52 [0.184, 0.846] | .002 |
| 5. Validation of Behaviour | | | | | | | / | / | / | / |
| 6. Negative Emotions | | | | | | | / | / | / | / |

### 4.1.3 Discussion

This study provides novel insights to the psychological process of supporting controversial leaders. This study supported the hypothesis that system justification is a distal predictor of reactions to controversial leaders. I also found support for the hypothesis that leader legitimacy is an important psychological mechanism and proximal predictor of reactions to controversial leaders. Indeed, the results revealed that leader legitimacy mediated the relationships between system justification and both validation of leader behaviour and negative emotions towards the leader. Specifically, higher leader legitimacy was associated with higher perceived ethicality, resulting in higher validation of Trump's behaviour; while low leader legitimacy triggered feelings of group threat, and raised negative emotions towards the new leader. In Study 5, I set out to further increase confidence in the reliability and validity of the previous results by recreating this novel conceptual model with a different political context marked by controversy (the UK). I examine reactions to the UK's leader Theresa May. May has faced significant backlash since she was nominated as Prime Minister, with criticism such as: 1) being handed the job only due to David Cameron's sudden resignation (Dewan & Isaac, 2016); and 2) calling for a snap election before its official time in a (failed) attempt to obtain majority government (Curtice, 2017). As such, I believe that the UK shares some parallels of political controversy, and will constitute a second test to the robustness of our model.

## 4.2 Study 5 – UK Theresa May

### 4.2.1 Method

**Procedure and participants**. Participants were asked to complete an online study (after May was appointed as Prime Minister and just before the snap elections) via Prolific Academic about UK citizens' perceptions regarding current social-political issues in the UK. A priori power analysis with $\alpha = .05$ revealed that a minimum sample size of 246 was

required to afford 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r$ = .25 for Structural Equation Modelling (Soper, 2020) with the respective parameters for the hypothesised model of this study. A sample of 407 UK citizens (174 men, 232 women, and 1 reported as 'other'), aged from 18 to 72 years old ($M$ = 37.39; $SD$ = 11.86), participated in this study.

**Measures.**

***System justification*** was measured with six statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .85), from Kay and Jost (2003)'s System Justification scale: (1) "In general, I find society to be fair"; (2) "In general, the UK political system operates as it should"; (3) "The UK is the best country in the world to live in"; (4) "Most policies serve the greater good"; (5) "Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness"; (6) "Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve".

***Leader legitimacy*** was measured with 4 items using bipolar 7-point scales (e.g., "What do you think of Theresa May as the next Prime Minister for the UK", *1 = Untrustworthy, Not credible, Unfair, Incompetent; 7 = Trustworthy, Credible, Fair, Competent*; α = .96).

***Ethical behaviour*** measured how ethical participants perceived May's behaviour to be by asking to what extent they thought that May's comments and actions were: (*1 = Are totally unethical, Clearly break rules, Clearly demonstrate a lack of integrity; 7 = Are totally ethical, Do not break any rules, Clearly demonstrate integrity*; α = .93).

***Validation of behaviour*** was measured by asking how much participants validated May's behaviour in four bipolar traits: (*1 = Unnecessary, Not valid, Unacceptable and Unjustifiable; 7 = Necessary, Very valid, Acceptable and Justifiable;* α = .98), based on (Vala et al., 2011).

***Group threat*** was measured with three items (*1 = I strongly disagree, 7 = I strongly agree*, α = .96): (1) "Theresa May is harmful to the UK"; (2) "Theresa May threatens the image of the UK"; (3) "Theresa May weakens my confidence on the UK political system".

***Negative emotions*** were measured by participants indicating how much negative emotions they felt towards Theresa May in four bipolar items: (*1 = No shame, No disappointment, No anger, No sadness; 7 = Great shame, Great disappointment, Great anger, Great sadness*; α = .97).

**4.2.2 Results**

Table 9 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in this study. I ran a Confirmatory Factor Analysis testing our main measurement model with our six sets of multi-item scales; loading 24 items onto 6 latent factors (6 system justification; 4 leader legitimacy; 3 ethical behaviour; 4 validation of behaviour; 3 group threat; and 4 negative emotions). This model fits the data well: $\chi^2(238) = 549.524$, $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = .97, TFI = .96, SRMR = .04

Table 9. *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables (Study 5).*

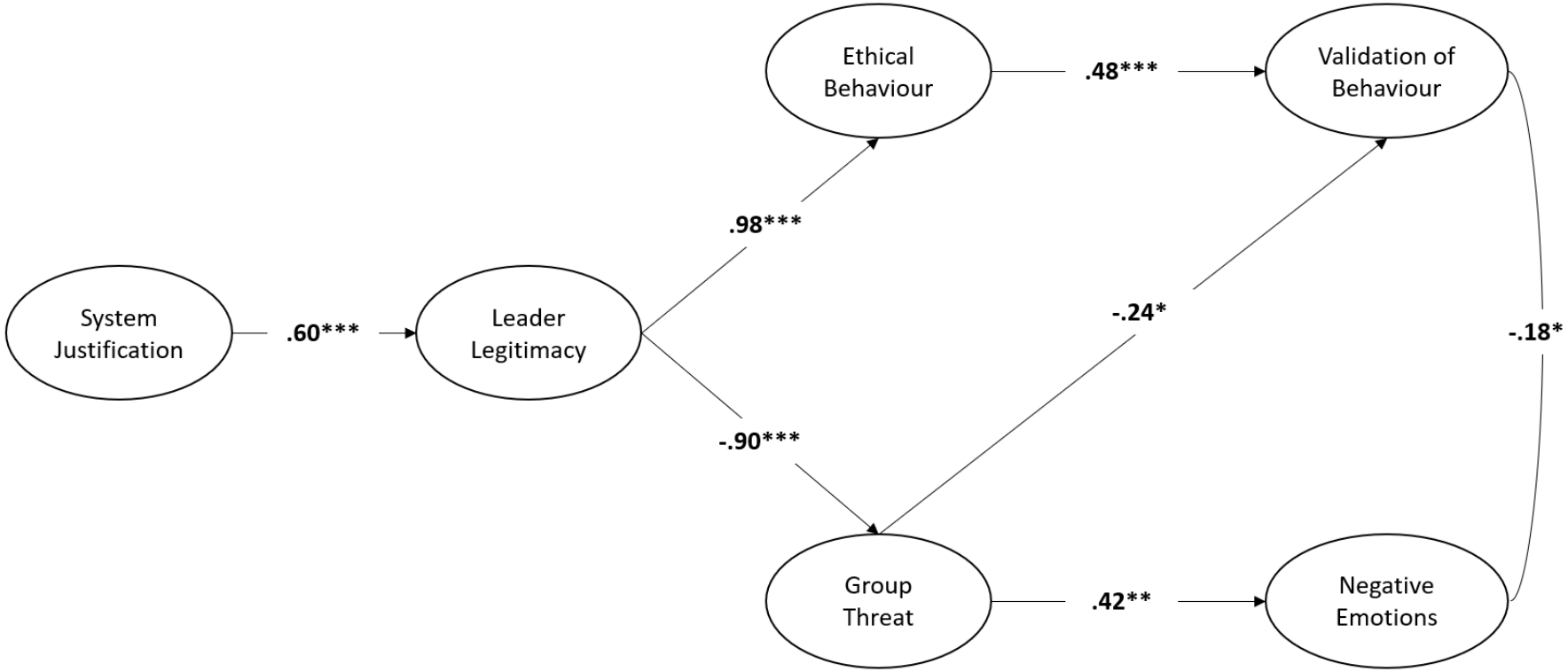
| | *M* (*SD*) | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. System Justification | 3.66 (1.17) | .532*** | .492*** | .494*** | -.475*** | -.445*** |
| 2. Leader Legitimacy | 3.51 (1.86) | – | .897*** | .891*** | -.850*** | -.786*** |
| 3. Ethical Behaviour | 3.73 (1.75) | | – | .884*** | -.830*** | -.762*** |
| 4. Validation of Behaviour | 3.70 (1.90) | | | – | -.853*** | -.801*** |
| 5. Group Threat | 4.20 (1.98) | | | | – | .799*** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | Negative Emotions | 4.16 (2.15) | – |

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

I tested my hypothesis using a structural equation model with latent variables on Mplus 7.4, with MLR estimation; see Figure 4 (full model results are presented in Table 10). As in Study 4, first I regressed leader legitimacy onto system justification, and then I created the same two different pathways depicting opposing reactions towards May as a leader. As such, I created a 'positive reactions' pathway, where validation of behaviour was regressed onto ethical behaviour, leader legitimacy, and system justification; ethical behaviour was regressed onto leader legitimacy, and system justification. Then, I created the 'negative reactions' pathway, where negative emotions were regressed onto group threat, leader legitimacy, and system justification; group threat was regressed onto leader legitimacy, and system justification. Additionally, I have also regressed validation of behaviour onto group threat; and regressed negative emotions onto ethical behaviour.

*Figure 4.* Associations (standardized estimates) of system justification on differential group reactions, via leader legitimacy (Study 5).




*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As expected, I observed a significant positive indirect effect between system justification and validation of the leader's behaviour, $\beta$ = 0.28, *SE* = .08, $p < 0.001$, [0.128, 0.438], and a significant negative indirect effect between system justification and negative emotions, $\beta$ = -0.23, SE = .06, $p < 0.001$, [-0.334, -0.118]. Consistently with my hypothesis, results show that system justification was associated with validation of behaviour via leader legitimacy and ethicality in sequence. In other words, the more participants justified the system, the more legitimate they perceived the leader to be, $\beta$ = 0.60 [0.522, 0.678], in turn, the more ethical they perceive the leader, $\beta$ = 0.98 [0.935, 1.021], and in turn the more they validate the leader behaviour, $\beta$ = .48 [0.218, 0.744]. Results also show that leader legitimacy was associated with group threat, $\beta$ = -0.90 [-0.963, -0.833], which, in turn, as associated with negative emotions, $\beta$ = .42 [0.239, 0.599].

Table 10. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of System justification and Leader legitimacy predicting Ethical behaviour, Group threat, Validation of behaviour and Negative emotions (Study 5).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | | 6. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* |
| 1. System Justification | 0.60 [0.522, 0.678] | <.001 | -0.03 [-0.095, 0.035] | .373 | 0.01 [-0.076, 0.100] | .794 | 0.00 [-0.063, 0.063] | .990 | -0.01 [-0.080, 0.066] | .858 |
| 2. Leader Legitimacy | / | / | 0.98 [0.935, 1.021] | <.001 | -0.90 [-0.963, -0.833] | <.001 | 0.25 [-0.065, 0.563] | .118 | -0.20 [-0.606, 0.210] | .342 |
| 3. Ethical Behaviour | | | / | / | / | / | 0.48 [0.218, 0.744] | <.001 | -0.26 [-0.647, 0.137] | .202 |
| 4. Group Threat | | | | | | | -0.24 [-0.363, -0.117] | <.001 | 0.42 [0.239, 0.599] | <.001 |
| 5. Validation of Behaviour | | | | | | | / | / | / | / |
| 6. Negative Emotions | | | | | | | / | / | / | / |

### 4.2.3 Discussion

The findings for Study 5 further increase confidence in the reliability and validity of our model by demonstrating the same psychological processes found in Study 4 regarding the psychological antecedents of the support for controversial leaders. Specifically, results showed that system justification is an important predictor of both negative (negative emotions via group threat) and positive (validation of leader behaviour via leader ethicality) reactions to controversial leaders. Furthermore, results support the hypothesis that leader legitimacy is an important psychological process through which system justification explains reactions to controversial leaders. Specifically, the more participants justified the system, the more they perceived the leader to be legitimate. In turn, the more legitimate participants perceived the leader to be, the more they (1) validated the leader's behaviour through stronger perceptions of leader ethicality and (2) the less negative emotions they expressed, with lower perceived group threat. However, the cross-sectional design of Studies 4 and 5 does not allow us to confirm the direction of the observed relationships (i.e., system justification predicting leader legitimacy). Study 6 addressed this limitation by including a time gap between the predictor and the mediators.

## 4.3 Study 6 – UK Boris Johnson

### 4.3.1. Method

**Procedure and participants**. Participants were asked to complete an online study in two different time points, 6 months apart, about UK citizens' perceptions regarding current social-political issues in the UK. The study was conducted via Prolific and 500 participants completed the survey in Wave 1 (shortly after Johnson was appointed as PM); 352 responded at follow-up (after Johnson won the 2019 General Elections; 6 months after Wave 1), with 8 participants removed because they failed the attention checks. Thus, the final sample at time 2 consisted of 344 participants (94 men, 248 women, and 2 reported as 'other'), aged from 18

to 81 years old ($M$ = 37.94; $SD$ = 13.04), who completed both Waves 1 and 2 (pre and post-elections). A priori power analysis with α = .05 revealed that a minimum sample size of 246 was required to afford 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r$ = .25 for Structural Equation Modelling (Soper, 2020) with the respective parameters for the hypothesised model of this study

**Measures**

I used the same measures as Study 4 (adapted to the 2019 UK General Elections context and directed towards Boris Johnson, where applicable) to measure System justification (W1, Cronbach's α = .85, W2, α = .85), Leader legitimacy (W1, Cronbach's α = .97, W2, α = .97), Ethical behaviour (W1, Cronbach's α = .92, W2, α = .94), Validation of behaviour (W1, Cronbach's α = .98, W2, α = .98), Group threat (W1, Cronbach's α = .96, W2, α = .97), and Negative emotions (W1, Cronbach's α = .97, W2, α = .97).

### 4.3.2. Results

In order to test the causal assumption between system justification and leader legitimacy, I planned to conduct a mediation model with temporal separation of the predictor and the mediator (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). This assumption was first supported by a cross-lagged model between both variables, which reveals a stronger effect from system justification (T1) to leader legitimacy (T2), compared to its reversed counterpart (see appendix C1). The cross-lagged model indicates that system justification can be considered a predictor of leader legitimacy – rather than the other way around. As such, we continued with our hypothesised model: system justification predicts leader legitimacy which, in turn, mediates differential group reactions towards the leader.

Table 11 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in this study. Before investigating our hypotheses, I used Mplus 7.4 to conduct longitudinal metric invariance testing to check whether the measurement model remained

stable over time. Specifically, I compared a longitudinal measurement model with freely estimated parameters with a model in which factor loadings of parallel indicators were constrained to be equal over time (i.e., defined to be invariant) (cf., T. A. Brown, 2015). A Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square difference test (appropriate for MLR estimators) showed no significant differences between the constrained, $\chi^2$ (1032) = 2179.301, $p < .001$, and unconstrained model, $\chi^2$ (1014) = 2147.886, $p < .001$, $\Delta\chi^2$= 25.189, *df* = 18, $p = .120$, ensuring that the factors maintained structural integrity over the two waves, thus achieving metric invariance.

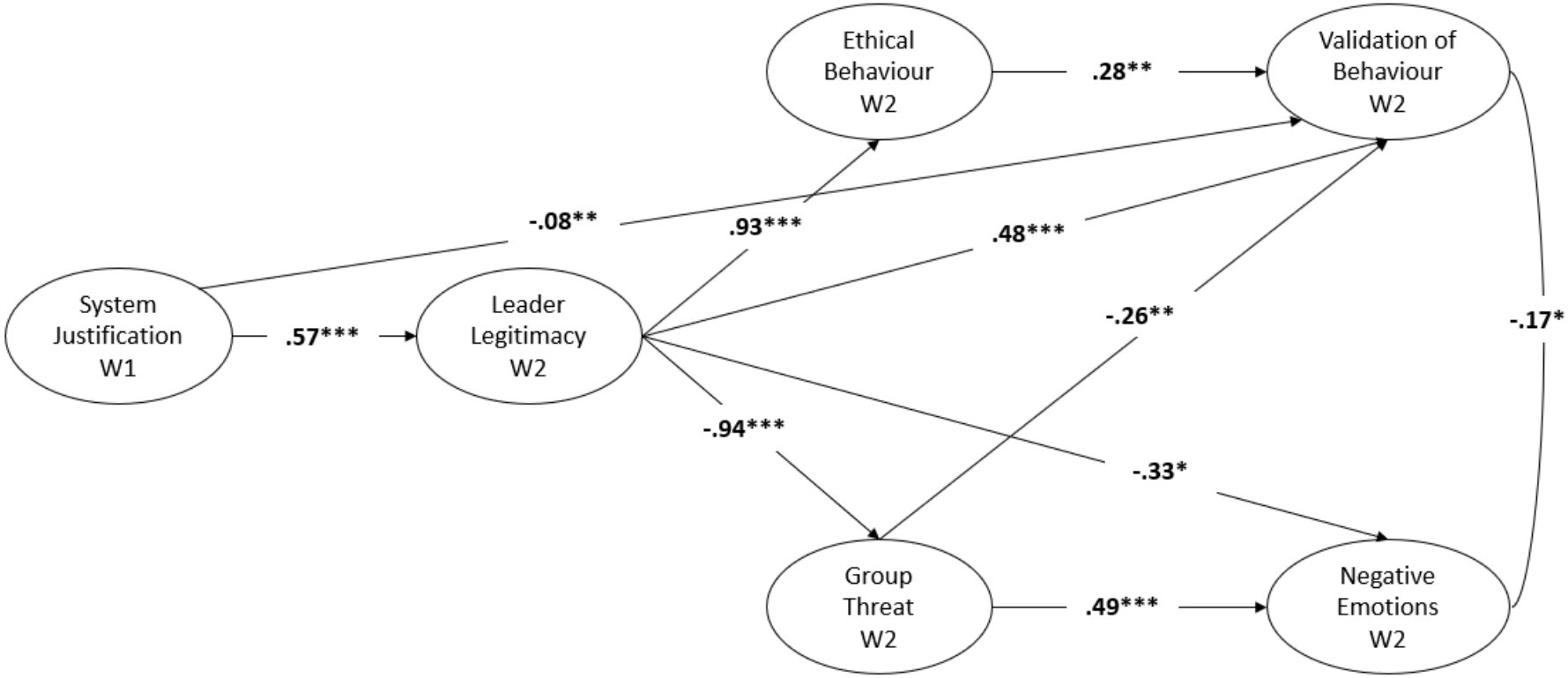
Table 11. *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables (Study 6).*

| | *M* (*SD*) | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. System Justification | 3.36 (1.15) | .526*** | .495*** | .444*** | -.477*** | -.466*** |
| 2. Leader Legitimacy | 3.01 (1.78) | – | .887*** | .914*** | -.900*** | -.880*** |
| 3. Ethical Behaviour | 2.94 (1.59) | | – | .874*** | -.850*** | -.833*** |
| 4. Validation of Behaviour | 3.22 (1.86) | | | – | -.895*** | -.877*** |
| 5. Group Threat | 4.69 (2.02) | | | | – | .890*** |
| 6. Negative Emotions | 4.57 (2.13) | | | | | – |

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

After confirming metric invariance, I ran a Confirmatory Factor Analysis testing on the main measurement model with our six sets of multi-item scales; loading 24 items onto 6 latent factors (6 system justification (W1); 4 leader legitimacy (W2); 3 ethical behaviour (W2); 4 validation of behaviour (W2); 3 group threat (W2); and 4 negative emotions (W2)). This model fits the data well: $\chi^2(237) = 424.207$, $\chi^2/df = 1.79$, RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = .98, TFI = .97, SRMR = .04. I then tested my hypothesis using the same structural equation model as in Studies 4 and 5; see Figure 5 (full model results are presented in Table 12).

*Figure 5.* Associations (standardized estimates) of system justification (1) on differential group reactions (W2), via leader legitimacy (W2) (Study 6).




*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As expected, there is a significant positive indirect effect between system justification and validation of the leader's behaviour, $\beta$ = 0.15, *SE* = .05, *p* = .006, [0.052, 0.248], and a significant negative indirect effect between system justification and negative emotions, $\beta$ = -0.26, SE = .07, *p* < 0.001, [-0.397, -0.123]. Consistently with my hypothesis, results show that system justification was associated with validation of behaviour via leader legitimacy and ethicality in sequence. In other words, the more participants justified the system, the more legitimate they perceived the leader to be, $\beta$ = 0.57 [0.474, 0.658], in turn, the more ethical they perceive the leader, $\beta$ = 0.93 [0.885, 0.975], and in turn the more they validate the leader behaviour, $\beta$ = .28 [0.090, 0.466]. Results also show that leader legitimacy was associated with group threat, $\beta$ = -0.94 [-0.984, -0.902], which, in turn, as associated with negative emotions, $\beta$ = .49 [0.252, 0.730].

Table 12. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of System justification (W1) and Leader legitimacy (W2) predicting Ethical behaviour (W2), Group threat (W2), Validation of behaviour (W2), and Negative emotions (W2) (Study 6).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | | 6. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* |
| 1. System Justification | 0.57 [0.474, 0.658] | <.001 | 0.02 [-0.047, 0.091] | .528 | 0.02 [-0.042, 0.084] | .508 | -0.08 [-0.129, -0.031] | .001 | 0.02 [-0.036, 0.070] | .527 |
| 2. Leader Legitimacy | / | / | 0.93 [0.885, 0.975] | <.001 | -0.94 [-0.984, -0.902] | <.001 | 0.48 [0.242, 0.720] | <.001 | -0.33 [-0.623, -0.039] | .026 |
| 3. Ethical Behaviour | | | / | / | / | / | 0.28 [0.090, 0.466] | .004 | -0.14 [-0.359, 0.087] | .232 |
| 4. Group Threat | | | | | | | -0.26 [-0.457, -0.069] | .008 | 0.49 [0.252, 0.730] | <.001 |
| 5. Validation of Behaviour | | | | | | | / | / | / | / |
| 6. Negative Emotions | | | | | | | / | / | / | / |

### 4.3.3. Discussion

The findings for Study 6 further increase confidence in the reliability and validity of our model by adding evidence of causality of the same psychological processes found in Studies 4 and 5 regarding the psychological antecedents of the support for controversial leaders. Specifically, results showed that system justification is a significant predictor of leader legitimacy, which consequently predicts both negative (negative emotions via group threat) and positive (validation of leader behaviour via leader ethicality) reactions to controversial leaders. Specifically, the more participants justified the system, the more they perceived the leader to be legitimate. In turn, the more legitimate participants perceived the leader to be, the more they (1) validated the leader's behaviour through stronger perceptions of leader ethicality and (2) the less negative emotions they expressed, with lower perceived group threat.

## 4.4 General Discussion

The findings from these studies advance knowledge in leadership research, by adopting a novel approach to the study of reactions to controversial leaders by combining individual differences and social factors and thus responding to recent calls in the field (Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Van de Vyver, Leite, Abrams, & Palmer, 2018). Indeed, results revealed a strong association between ideology (system justification beliefs), with leaders' perceived legitimacy. Furthermore, I tested how leader legitimacy mediated the process between system justification and (positive vs. negative) group reactions towards three controversial leaders. Overall, I demonstrated that higher system justifiers are more willing to support controversial leaders, because they are perceived as more legitimate. In turn, people who legitimized Trump, May, or Johnson more as a leader, perceived them as displaying more ethical behaviour, and consequently evaluated their decisions as being better. On the contrary, non-legitimizers perceived their leader as more threatening to the country, resulting

in a higher negative emotional state. These results give insight as to why some leaders that engage in moral transgressions may enjoy a double standard (Abrams et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). This research shows that leader legitimacy is an important psychological process through which system justification affects ethicality and reaction to controversial leaders. This finding supports the hypothesis that reactions to controversial leaders are not only shaped by individual ideologies or traits attributed to the leader, but a combination of both individual differences variables (system justification) and social factors (legitimacy of leaders). These studies provided support to the proposition that system justification is a distal predictor of reactions towards leaders, whereas leader legitimacy is a proximal predictor of such reactions. Moreover, this research is consistent across two different political landscapes: the US and UK, suggesting that this process is potentially generalizable across other examples of leadership. Considering the role of leaders in shaping and promoting ethical conduct (Ciulla, 1998; Freeman et al., 1988; Treviño, 1990), it becomes especially relevant to understand when leaders modulate their followers' behaviour (M. E. Brown et al., 2005). Indeed, as the perception of the leader's (il)legitimacy becomes a reference for acceptable behaviour, the divide and conflict between people might exponentially increase as leaders continuously propose extreme (and controversial) measures.

Methodologically, it is important to note that there are some unusually high correlations between some of the measures in our proposed models, which may raise an issue of multicollinearity between the respective variables. In high cases of multicollinearity, it may be harder to assess the relative importance of the predicting variables. Although there is no formal baseline for confirming multicollinearity, values of variance inflation factor (VIF) that exceed 10 are often regarded as indicating high multicollinearity (Fox & Monette, 1992). VIF tests were conducted between leader legitimacy, ethical behaviour and group threat for all studies. The highest VIF values from each study were found in either ethical behaviour

(Study 4, VIF = 5.17; Study 6, VIF = 5.26) or group threat (Study 5, VIF = 5.13), which are significantly lower than the 'baseline' of 10. Even though a VIF of 5 may still suggest some overlap between the ethical behaviour and group threat variables, it does not represent a significant issue of multicollinearity, and thus no adjustments to the models were required.

#### 4.4.1. Future research developments

It would be interesting to test the current model to observe how these attitudes translate into actual behaviour. For example, strong feelings of anger and/or dissatisfaction raised by perceived injustice inflicted to the group may translate into collective action (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Osborne, Smith, & Huo, 2012; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; Tausch et al., 2011). In this sense, negative emotions (i.e., anger) might function as accelerators or amplifiers to social movements (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010) directed towards controversial leaders, particularly when they are perceived as illegitimate by followers. Indeed, when social inequality is promoted by the hands of authorities perceived as legitimate, they seem to raise less anger, while illegitimate inequality triggers more anger and nonconforming behaviour (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Major, 1994). In this sense, it would be relevant to research the potential link between people's personal system-justifying beliefs, their perceptions regarding leader legitimacy and how these might transform into collective group reactions (i.e., social movements) to either maintain the current status quo or attempt to change it. It would also be interesting to investigate how intergroup categorisations within the same broader group (e.g., political parties or political ideologies) played out on the observed effects from this research. In this sense, party membership or political ideology may play a moderating role on the legitimacy of controversial leaders, and further polarise people's attitudes and reactions towards these leaders.

## Chapter V: The legitimization of prejudice

As discussed in Chapter IV, research on system justification theory has demonstrated that people have a psychological need to defend and justify the status quo (see Jost et al., 2004, for a review on system justification theory). According to this theory, when the system is perceived to be under threat, there is a greater tendency to embrace system-justifying ideologies (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Indeed, this need to defend and justify the social system seems to be particularly stronger when the status quo is perceived to be under threat, in which case, people will strive to maintain the existing status inequalities (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). In fact, these elevated perceptions of in-group superiority and greater acceptance of status inequalities may actually be the outcome of perceptions of intergroup threat (Doosje, Loseman, & van den Bos, 2013). In this sense, those who feel more threatened by the perceived impact that an outgroup (e.g., immigrants) may have on an ingroup, should be more motivated to justify the system and strive to maintain the status quo. Indeed, a typical reflection of strong endorsement of system justification often translates into less support in favour of measures for social change and redistribution of resources (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

On the other hand, research from the social identity perspective provides other insights that are useful to understand negative outgroup attitudes. Indeed, research has consistently shown that highly identified individuals are prone to engage in ingroup bias, and in that process, engage in outgroup hostility and discrimination (e.g., Doosje, Zimmermann, Küpper, Zick, & Meertens, 2009; W. G. Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Because there is a strong link between social identification and the origin of intergroup processes (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 2004), I expect that national identification should play a vital role in predicting intergroup threat perceptions. Consequently, I argue that people with higher perceptions of intergroup threat (i.e. symbolic threat and/or realistic threat) towards outgroups (i.e. immigrants) will be more system justifying, in comparison to people with

lower perceptions of intergroup threat. Further, considering past literature and our previous research (see Chapter IV) on the role that system justification may play in endorsing authorities/leaders that protect the status quo, I argue that people higher in system justification will legitimize more their respective leaders, particularly, if these leaders are known to work to maintain status inequalities (e.g., through strict immigration policies).

**The Nature of Intergroup Threat**

There is substantial research investigating the predictive role of perceived intergroup threat on negative attitudes towards outgroups. According to the intergroup threat theory, "intergroup threat is experienced when members of one group perceive that another group wishes to, or is in a position to, cause them harm" (W. G. Stephan et al., 2009, p. 256). Given that some argue that intergroup threat is a broad concept (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005), academics have often divided threat into different categories. In the originally named integrated threat theory (W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 2000), the authors proposed four types of threat: realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes. However, this theory was later revised and focused only on the first two types (W. G. Stephan & Renfro, 2002). In a similar vein, the biocultural model of intergroup emotions (Neuberg & Cottrell, 2002) suggests that intergroup threat can also be divided into two categories: threats relating to group-level resources and threats relating to the group's integrity – comparatively to *realistic threats* and *symbolic threats,* respectively. Given that this chapter's focus on system justification as a reaction to perceived threats to system (and resulting consequences for leader support and intergroup relations), the chapter will focus on the role of these two types of intergroup threat. Realistic threats refer to perceived potential threats that might endanger the group's safety and resources, often associated with threats to the ingroup's economic security and safety (W. G. Stephan et al., 2009). Symbolic threats

refer to more abstract types of threats, often associated with perceived threats to the group's value, morality or perceived competence (W. G. Stephan et al., 2009).

While initially some might have argued on the particular importance of one type of threat or the other, scholars have more recently adopted the conception that these might be complementary, instead of being mutually exclusive (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). In fact, it seems likely that both types of threat account for different portions of variance in attitudes towards outgroups (McLaren, 2001; Wilson, 2001). In some cases, the role of each type of threat may even vary according to social context and outgroup (Abrams & Eller, 2016). For example, Neuberg and Cottrell (2002)'s research revealed that White American participants generally reported stronger realistic threat perceptions (i.e. perceptions of threat to the ingroup's safety and personal property) towards African Americans, while reporting more symbolic threats (i.e. perceptions of threat to ingroup values, along with emotions such as pity and guilt) towards Native Americans. Similarly, in a study regarding majority-minority cultural differences, symbolic threat was found to be a predictor of prejudice from the majority group Hindus towards the minority group Muslims, while realistic threat was a primary predictor vice versa (Tausch, Hewstone, & Roy, 2009). Similarly, some research has shown that symbolic threat (and not realistic threat) was one of the strongest predictors (along with intergroup anxiety and negative contact) of negative attitudes towards men (C. W. Stephan, Stephan, Demitrakis, Yamada, & Clason, 2000). The authors argued that this effect of symbolic threat might be due to men's perceived greater prestige and power in a patriarchal society. As such, research is accumulating that suggests that 1) both types of intergroup threat are relevant, and 2) that people may perceive different types of threat and attribute differing emotional reactions depending on the relevant outgroup and/or context.

On the topic of immigration, even though both realistic threat and symbolic threat perceptions usually play a role in explaining prejudice or opposition to immigration, it may

be that each type of perceived threat explains different types of discriminatory behaviour. Specifically, realistic threat perceptions seem to play a bigger role in explaining the relationship between prejudice and opposition to immigration, whereas symbolic threat perceptions are likely to explain aspects of discrimination that are more associated with identity motives, such as naturalization (Pereira, Vala, & Costa-Lopes, 2010). Case in point, recent research has shown that realistic threat perceptions associated with EU immigrants seems to have played a significant greater role in voting decisions in the Brexit referendum, whereas the effects of symbolic threat were less pronounced and non-significant (Van de Vyver et al., 2018). In sum, the existing evidence suggests that each type of perceived threat of intergroup threat may be dependent on the relevant outgroup, the situational context, and the nature of the measured outcomes. Considering the multi-layered nature behind intergroup threat and how it can be triggered by different social contexts and outgroups, I propose that social identification processes should be implicated in predicting processes of intergroup threat.

### National Identification Paving the Way for Intergroup Threat

Social identification, that is, the part of individuals self-concept that is derived from group memberships (Tajfel, 1978) has been shown to be widely associated with intergroup attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, those who identify with their groups are prone to engage in ingroup bias, through which may be reflected in attitudes towards members of other groups, and even in resource allocations. Importantly, ingroup bias is known to be associated with outgroup hostility and discrimination (e.g., Doosje et al., 2009; W. G. Stephan et al., 2009). Previous research has also highlighted the relationship between ingroup identification and intergroup threat (see Riek et al., 2006, for a meta-analytic review), although there is little consensus in respect to causality or direction of effects (or even whether the effects are additive or interactive). In fact, research on the relationship between these two concepts seem

to be divided in three different identity models. First, the *group identity lens* model, in line with self-categorization theory (see Turner & Reynolds, 2012, for a review) posits that national identification is an antecedent of perceived outgroup threat which, in turn, may be associated with lowered support for minority rights. Indeed, some researchers have argued that ingroup identification might be a booster for intergroup threat, as high ingroup identifiers tend to be more sensitive to potential harms to their group (Riek et al., 2006). For example, a study in the Netherlands found that strongly identified Dutch participants perceived ethnic minorities as a potential threat to Dutch culture and their society (van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). Second, the *group identity moderator* model, in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), assumes that national identification actually interacts with outgroup threat to predict said support for multiculturalism and minority rights. For example, previous research has shown that among Israeli citizens, national identity played a moderation role in the relationship between threat and prejudice, particularly as realistic threat (but not symbolic threat) more strongly predicted prejudice towards immigrants for high identifiers (Bizman & Yinon, 2001). On the other hand, research in Northern Ireland reported that symbolic threat (but not realistic threat) predicted attitudes and trust towards outgroups, only among high identifiers (Tausch, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2007).

Third, the *group identity reaction* model predicts that perceived group threat actually promotes individuals' ingroup identification, consequently resulting in stronger negative outgroups reactions. Effectively, some research has experimentally shown that threat can instead increase ingroup identification (Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001). In fact, it seems that perceived discrimination among minority groups might increase ingroup identification (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). However, this effect might be exclusive to ingroup minorities, as Schlueter, Schmidt, and Wagner (2008) have experimentally demonstrated that perceived group threat is the causal antecedent of

outgroup derogation (and not the other way around). According to research framed by the *group identity reaction model*, considering how majority groups generally have a relatively secure status in society, it is unlikely that threats posed by immigrants would lead to stronger national identification (Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008). Because there is substantial (and ongoing) disagreement on the causality between national identification and intergroup threat, some researchers have attempted to provide competitive testing between all the respective models. For example, across three studies, Verkuyten (2009) found that the data strongly supported the group identity lens model: national identification was positively associated with outgroup threat and, in turn, negatively associated with support for multiculturalism and minority rights. In comparison, the findings did not reveal enough evidence to support either the identity moderator model or the group identity reaction model. More recent research (e.g., Badea, Iyer, & Aebischer, 2018; Molina & Preddie, 2020) has added evidence to the idea that intergroup threat mediates the relationship between national identity and attitudes towards immigrants. Although there is significant more research (and debate) attempting to pin down the most accurate model, this is not the objective of the present chapter. The main goal of this research is to use this previously explored link between the national identification and intergroup threat frameworks as a guide to explore and deepen our understanding of the process of legitimizing controversial leaders. As such, in the current studies, I expect national identification to be the predictor of intergroup threat perceptions towards immigrants. Consequently, higher perception of intergroup threat should be associated with greater justification of the system, thus resulting in greater legitimacy of like-minded leaders (leaders strict on immigration). Ultimately, national identification should be the distal predictor of legitimacy of such leaders, mediated sequentially by both intergroup threat and system justification.

## Overview of studies

In three studies, I tested the idea that the more people identify with their country, the more they will feel threatened by immigrants, further believing the system as just and supporting the status quo and, consequently, support leaders (May, Trump, or Johnson, respectively) publicly known to generally disregard immigrants' rights. Specifically, I tested the assumption that participants higher in national identification would report higher levels of intergroup threat (symbolic threat and realistic threat) which, in turn, would lead to greater system justification and, finally, lead to greater legitimacy of their respective leader. Conversely, I would expect lower identified individuals would feel less threatened by immigrants, recognise the system as more unjust and, thus, ascribe lower legitimacy to the respective country's leader. However, as discussed earlier, it is important to take into account that intergroup threat processes are sensitive to the relevant outgroups/contexts and, therefore, I will explore whether both intergroup threat perceptions will affect the outcomes and if so, whether they vary in strength. Considering that all our three studies occur in different socio-political contexts, we may observe alternative variations regarding the effects of both types of intergroup threat across studies.

## 5.1. Study 7 – UK Theresa May

### 5.1.1 Method

**Procedure and participants**. Participants were asked to complete an online study (one year after the 2017 General Elections) distributed through Prolific Academic regarding citizens' perceptions regarding current social-political issues in the UK. A sample of 241 UK citizens participated in this study (103 men and 138 women), aged from 19 to 72 years old ($M$ = 39.39; $SD$ = 12.00). Participants all reported being British, with the majority of participants indicating they were White (92.1%), followed by Asian (4.6%), Mixed/multiple ethnic groups (2.1%), and Black (1.2%). In the 2017 General Elections, 39.4% of our sample

reported voting for the Labour Party (*n* = 95), 34.0% for the Conservative Party (*n* = 82), 7.1% for the Liberal Democrat Party (*n* = 17), 5.8% for the SNP (*n* = 14), 2.5% for the Green Party (*n* = 6), 2.5% for UKIP (*n* = 6), 0.8% for an unspecified party (*n* = 2), 6.6% did not reveal who they voted for (*n* = 16), and 1.2% did not vote (*n* = 3). A priori power analysis with α = .05 revealed that a minimum sample size of 233 was required to afford 80% power to detect effect sizes of *r* = .25 for Structural Equation Modelling (Soper, 2020) with the respective parameters for the hypothesised model of this study

**Measures.**

***National Identification*** was measured with six statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; α* = .94) adapted from Duriez, Reijerse, Luyckx, Vanbeselaere, and Meeus (2013)'s National Identification scale: 1) I feel like I am a member of UK citizens as a group; 2) Being a UK citizen is important to define who I am; 3) I am proud to be a UK citizen; 4) I feel strong ties with UK citizens; 5) In many ways, I resemble other UK citizens; 6) I consider myself as a typical UK citizen.

***Symbolic threat*** was measured with seven statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; α* = .88), from W. G. Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman (1999)'s Symbolic Threat scale: 1) Immigrants should learn to conform to the rules and norms of the UK society as soon as possible after they arrive; 2) Immigration is undermining the UK's culture; 3) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of most UK citizens (reverse-coded); 4) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most UK citizens; 5) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding family issues and socializing children are basically quite similar to those of most UK citizens (reverse-coded); 6) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding social relations are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most UK citizens; 7) Immigrants should not have to accept the UK ways (Reverse-coded).

***Realistic threat*** was measured with eight statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .93), from W. G. Stephan et al. (1999)'s Realistic Threat scale: 1) Immigrants get more from this country than they contribute; 2) The children of immigrants should have the same right to attend public schools in the UK as UK citizens do (reverse-coded); 3) Immigration has increased the tax burden on UK citizens; 4) Immigrants are not displacing UK workers from their jobs (reverse-coded); 5) Immigrants should be eligible for the same health-care benefits received by UK citizens (reverse-coded); 6) Social services have become less available to UK citizens because of immigration; 7) The quality of social services available to UK citizens has remained the same, despite immigration (reverse-coded); 8) Immigrants are as entitled to subsidized housing or subsidized utilities (water, sewage, electricity) as poor UK citizens are (reverse-coded).

***System justification*** was measured with six statements[6] (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .88), from Kay and Jost (2003) System Justification scale: 1) In general, I find society to be fair; 2) In general, the UK political system operates as it should; 3) The UK is the best country in the world to live in; 4) Most policies serve the greater good; 5) Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness; 6) Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.

***Leader legitimacy*** items were based on attributes typically known to endow leaders with legitimacy, such as trustworthiness, credibility, competence, fairness (e.g., Hollander, 2006; Julian et al., 1969; Ratcliff & Vescio, 2017; Tyler, 2006; Vial et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2010). There were 4 items using bipolar 7-point scales ("What do you think of Theresa May

[6]Similarly to the previous studies, we removed two statements ("The UK society needs to be radically restructured" and "Our society is getting worse every year") from this scale due to poor factor loading.

as the current leader of the UK", *1 = Untrustworthy, Not credible, Unfair, Incompetent; 7 = Trustworthy, Credible, Fair, Competent*; α = .96).

### 5.1.2 Results

Table 13 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in this study. Surprisingly, the data shows no correlation between both types of intergroup threat (i.e. symbolic threat and realistic threat) with either national identification, *rs* ≤ .10, *ps* ≥ 135, or system justification, *rs* ≤ -.01, *ps* ≥ 857. All other variables correlate at some level, *rs* ≤ .14, *ps* ≥ 031. As such, it is unlikely that we will find in our model an association between national identification with intergroup threat (symbolic or realistic threat), and between intergroup threat with system justification. Still, I decided to continue with the analysis to verify if any other paths were found.

Table 13. *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables (Study 7)*

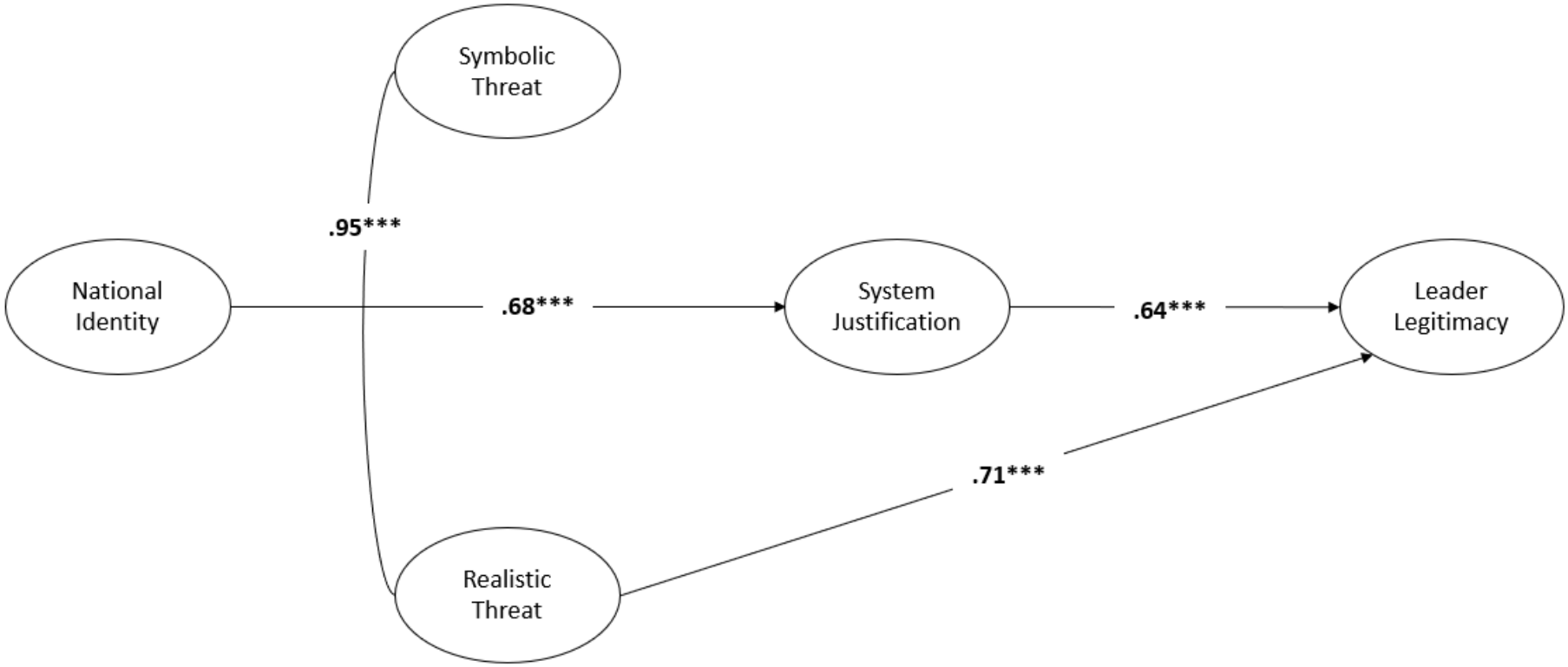
| | *M* (*SD*) | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. National Identification | 4.94 (1.31) | .093 | .097 | .633*** | .339*** |
| 2. Symbolic Threat | 4.21 (1.28) | – | .857*** | -.012 | .139* |
| 3. Realistic Threat | 3.86 (1.45) | | – | .002 | .221** |
| 4. System Justification | 3.64 (1.23) | | | – | .541*** |
| 5. Leader Legitimacy | 3.33 (1.73) | | | | – |

*$p$ < .05, ** $p$ < .01, *** $p$ < .001

I ran a Confirmatory Factor Analyses testing our main measurement model with our four sets of multi-item scales; loading 31 items onto 5 latent factors (6 national identification; 7 symbolic threat; 8 realistic threat; 6 system justification; and 4 leader legitimacy). The

model fit for this data is adequate: $\chi^2(424) = 945.495$, $\chi 2 / df = 2.23$, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = .90, TFI = .89, SRMR = .08. I tested my initial hypothesis using a structural equation model with latent variables on Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2013) with ML estimation; see Figure 6 (full model results are presented in Table 14). Specifically, first I regressed both symbolic threat and realistic threat onto national identification; second, I regressed system justification onto both symbolic threat, realistic threat and national identification; third, I regressed leader legitimacy onto system justification, symbolic threat, realistic threat, and national identification.

*Figure 6.* Associations (standardized estimates) of national identity on leader legitimacy, via intergroup threat (symbolic and realistic threat) and system justification (Study 7).




*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

I initially hypothesised that national identification would be associated with leader legitimacy, and that this association would be mediated by either both intergroup threat and system justification, sequentially. As expected, due to the lack of the relevant correlations, results showed no association between national identification with symbolic threat, $\beta$ = .14, *SE* = .09, *p* = .124, [-0.039, 0.325], or realistic threat, $\beta$ = .14, *SE* = .08, *p* = .087, [-0.020, 0.298]. Similarly, there was no association between system justification with symbolic threat, $\beta$ = -.10, *SE* = .33, *p* = .754, [-0.750, 0.554], or realistic threat, $\beta$ = .002, *SE* = .32, *p* = .996, [-0.633, 0.637]. As such, there is no support for a mediation process including intergroup threat. However, there was a direct effect between realistic threat and leader legitimacy, $\beta$ = 0.71, *SE* = .30, *p* = .016, [0.131, 1.295], suggesting that participants with higher perceptions of realistic threat towards immigrants also ascribed more legitimacy to May as a leader. Furthermore, I also found a significant positive indirect effect between national identification and leader legitimacy, mediated through system justification, $\beta$ = 0.43, *SE* = .07, *p* < .001 [0.306, 0.560]. In this sense, participants that identified more strongly with their country, also justified more the system, $\beta$ = 0.68, *SE* = .04, *p* < .001, [0.598, 0.758] and, in turn, legitimised May more as a leader, $\beta$ = 0.64, *SE* = .09, *p* < .001, [0.470, 0.808].

Table 14. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of National identity and Intergroup threat (Symbolic and Realistic threat) predicting System justification and Leader Legitimacy (Study 7).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* |
| 1. National Identity | 0.14 [-0.039, 0.325] | .124 | 0.14 [-0.020, 0.298] | .087 | 0.68 [0.598, 0.758] | <.001 | -0.09 [-0.275, 0.097] | .346 |
| 2. Symbolic Threat | / | / | 0.95 [0.909, 0.983] | <.001 | -0.10 [-0.750, 0.544] | .754 | -0.48 [-1.085, 0.123] | .119 |
| 3. Realistic Threat | | | / | / | 0.00 [-0.633, 0.637] | .996 | 0.71 [0.131, 1.295] | .016 |
| 4. System Justification | | | | | | | 0.64 [0.470, 0.808] | <.001 |
| 5. Leader Legitimacy | | | | | | | / | / |

### 5.1.3 Discussion

In this study, I explored the potential antecedents of system justification and legitimization of controversial leaders. According to the previous literature, we would expect national identification to predict intergroup threat, namely symbolic threat and/or realistic threat, which, in turn, would predict system justification, resulting in greater leader legitimacy. Surprisingly, I did not find any association between intergroup threat with either national identification or system justification. However, the data showed an independent association between realistic threat and leader legitimacy, meaning that people that perceived immigrants as a higher potential threat to the country, also ascribed more legitimacy to May, known for her strict stance on immigration. Taking into account the past context of uncertainty surrounding Brexit at the time this data was collected (a year after the vote was carried out), it is understandable that British citizens who felt 'realistic' threat of immigrants (e.g., for taking their jobs, resources, services, etc.) would legitimize more leaders like May, known for her strict stance on immigration, and who confidently promised that she would deliver Brexit. Considering more recent events, particularly May's failure at delivering Brexit and abandoning her role as PM, it would have been interesting to observe how British citizens' perceptions regarding her legitimacy could have shifted. Nevertheless, this study revealed that people that identified more strongly with the country, also leaned towards higher justification of the system, thus legitimizing more the leader. Not only is the finding that system justification plays a role in the legitimization of controversial leaders consistent with our previous studies (in chapter IV), but it also raises the importance of national identification on maintaining the system and legitimizing such leaders. Naturally, the more people identify with their country, the less open they would be for change, particularly regarding 'outsiders'. Consequently, system justifiers look into leaders that would strive for the status quo. In the following study, I will test the same model in the context of the US.

Trump is also famously known for his extreme stance of immigration, yet the country is not going through a Brexit state. As such, it is important to observe potential differences in how both types of intergroup threat interact with the legitimization of the US leader.

## 5.2 Study 8 – US Donald Trump

### 5.2.1 Method

**Procedure and participants**. Participants were asked to complete an online study (two years after Trump was elected and shortly before the US Midterms elections) distributed through Qualtrics about US citizens' perceptions regarding current social-political issues in the US. A sample of 401 US citizens participated in this study (167 men, 232 women, and 2 reported as other gender), aged from 18 to 81 years old ($M$ = 41.71; $SD$ = 14.07). Participants all reported being American, with the majority of participants indicating they were White (80.8%), followed by Black (7.5%), Latino (4.7%), Asian (4.5%), Native American (0.5%), and Other (2.0%). Regarding political orientation, our sample consisted in 42.9% Democrats ($n$ = 172), 28.4% Republicans ($n$ = 114), and 28.7 'Other' ($n$ = 115). In the 2016 Presidential Elections, 39.2% of our sample reported voting for Hillary Clinton ($n$ = 157), 28.7% for Donald Trump ($n$ = 115), 10.2% for 'Other' ($n$ = 41), 19.7% did not vote ($n$ = 79), and 2.2% preferred not to say ($n$ = 9). A priori power analysis with $\alpha = .05$ revealed that a minimum sample size of 233 was required to afford 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r = .25$ for Structural Equation Modelling (Soper, 2020) with the respective parameters for the hypothesised model of this study

**Measures**

***National Identification*** was measured with six statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .93) adapted from Duriez et al. (2013)'s National Identification scale: 1) I feel American; 2) Being an American citizen is important to define who I am; 3) I am proud

to be American; 4) I feel strong ties/a bond with American citizens; 5) In many ways, I resemble other American citizens; 6) I consider myself a typical American citizen.

***Symbolic threat*** was measured with seven statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .86), from W. G. Stephan et al. (1999)'s Symbolic Threat scale: 1) Immigrants should learn to conform to the rules and norms of American society as soon as possible after they arrive; 2) Immigration is undermining the American culture; 3) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of most Americans (reverse-coded); 4) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans; 5) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding family issues and socializing children are basically quite similar to those of most Americans (reverse-coded); 6) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding social relations are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans; 7) Immigrants should not have to accept American ways (Reverse-coded).

***Realistic threat*** was measured with eight statements (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .94), from W. G. Stephan et al. (1999)'s Realistic Threat scale: 1) Immigrants get more from this country than they contribute; 2) The children of immigrants should have the same right to attend public schools in the United States as Americans do (reverse-coded); 3) Immigration has increased the tax burden on Americans; 4) Immigrants are not displacing American workers from their jobs (reverse-coded); 5) Immigrants should be eligible for the same health-care benefits received by Americans (reverse-coded); 6) Social services have become less available to Americans because of immigration; 7) The quality of social services available to Americans has remained the same, despite immigration (reverse-coded); 8) Immigrants are as entitled to subsidized housing or subsidized utilities (water, sewage, electricity) as poor Americans are (reverse-coded).

***System justification*** was measured with six statements[7] (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;* $\alpha$ = .89), from Kay and Jost (2003) System Justification scale: 1) In general, I find society to be fair; 2) In general, the American political system operates as it should; 3) The United States is the best country in the world to live in; 4) Most policies serve the greater good; 5) Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness; 6) Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.

***Leader legitimacy*** items were based on attributes typically known to endow leaders with legitimacy, such as trustworthiness, credibility, competence, fairness (e.g., Hollander, 2006; Julian et al., 1969; Ratcliff & Vescio, 2017; Tyler, 2006; Vial et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2010). There were 4 items using bipolar 7-point scales ("What do you think of President Trump as the current leader of the USA", *1 = Untrustworthy, Not credible, Unfair, Incompetent; 7 = Trustworthy, Credible, Fair, Competent*; $\alpha$ = .98).

**5.2.2 Results**

Table 15 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in this study. All variables correlated with each other (all *rs* $\geq$.357, *ps* < .001). I ran a Confirmatory Factor Analyses testing our main measurement model with our four sets of multi-item scales; loading 31 items onto 5 latent factors (6 national identification; 7 symbolic threat; 8 realistic threat; 6 system justification; and 4 leader legitimacy). This model fits the

[7]Similarly to the previous studies, we removed two statements ("American society needs to be radically restructured" and "Our society is getting worse every year") from this scale due to poor factor loading.

data adequately: $\chi^2(418) = 1185.659$, $\chi 2$ / *df* = 2.84, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = .92, TFI = .91, SRMR = .06[8].

Table 15. *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables (Study 8)*

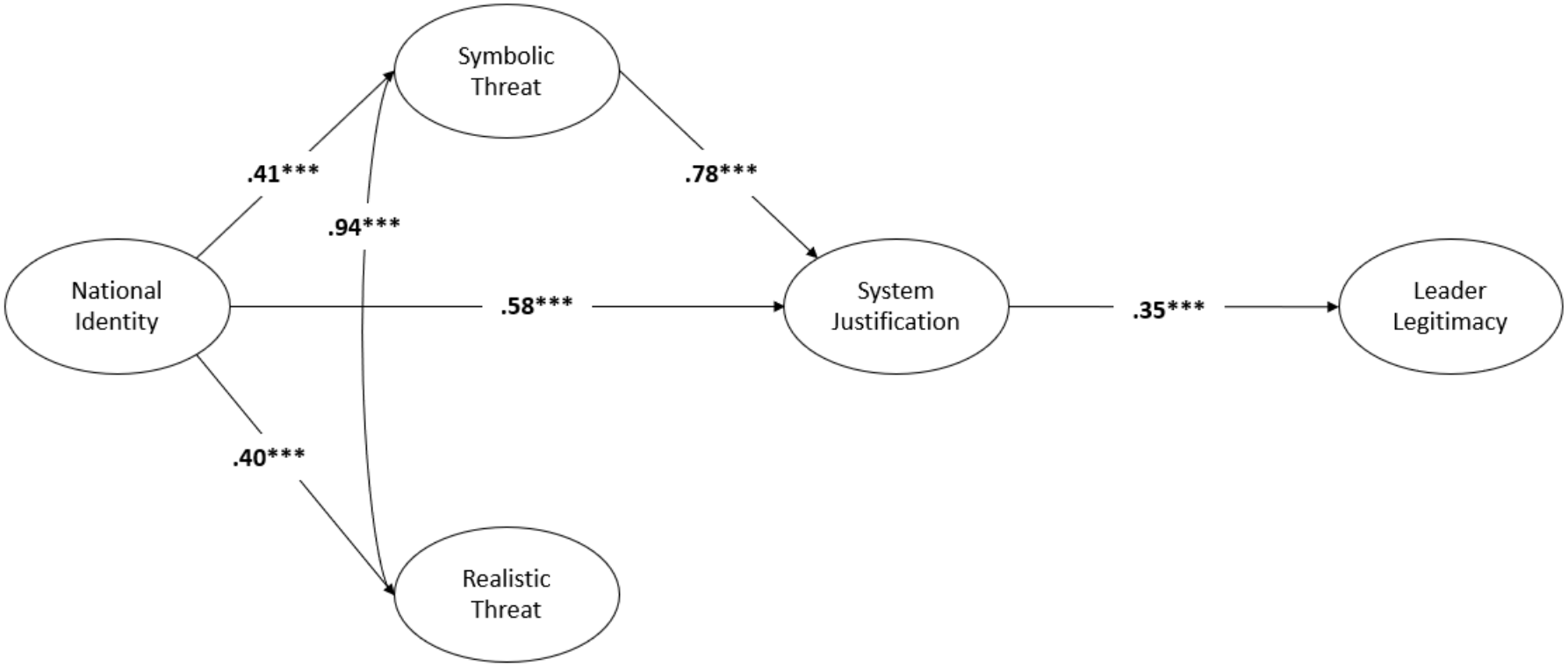
| | *M* (*SD*) | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. National Identification | 5.34 (1.28) | .378*** | .357*** | .627*** | .440*** |
| 2. Symbolic Threat | 3.57 (1.30) | – | .826*** | .430*** | 623*** |
| 3. Realistic Threat | 3.46 (1.55) | | – | .390*** | .627*** |
| 4. System Justification | 3.82 (1.35) | | | – | .570*** |
| 5. Leader Legitimacy | 3.09 (2.17) | | | | – |

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

I tested my main hypothesis using a structural equation model with latent variables on Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2013) with ML estimation; see Figure 7 (full model results are presented in Table 16). Specifically, first I regressed both symbolic threat and realistic threat onto national identification; second, I regressed system justification onto both symbolic threat, realistic threat and national identification; third, I regressed leader legitimacy onto system justification, symbolic threat, realistic threat, and national identification.

[8] We applied six modification indices between pairs of items of the symbolic and realistic threat scales to improve model fit (symbolic threat paired items: 5-3, 6-4, 7-1; realistic threat paired items: 5-2, 6-3, 8-5). The observed associations between latent variables did not change after applying these modification indices.

*Figure 7.* Associations (standardized estimates) of national identity on leader legitimacy, via intergroup threat (symbolic and realistic threat) and system justification (Study 8).




*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Consistent with my hypothesis, I found a significant positive indirect effect between national identification and leader legitimacy, through symbolic threat and system justification, sequentially, $\beta$ = .11, *SE* = .06, *p* = .041, [0.003, 0.219]. Specifically, the data shows that participants with a stronger national identity also perceive higher symbolic threat towards immigrants, $\beta$ = .41, *SE* = .06, *p* < .001, [0.298, 0.526], which is then associated with a greater belief that the system is just, $\beta$ = .78, *SE* = .36, *p* = .028, [0.084, 1.480] which, in turn, is associated with a greater ascribed legitimacy for Trump as a leader, $\beta$ = .35, *SE* = .08, *p* < .001, [0.197, 0.495]. Additionally, consistent with the previous study, I found a significant positive indirect effect between national identification and leader legitimacy, mediated only by system justification, $\beta$ = .20, *SE* = .05, *p* < .001, [0.102, 0.302]. This finding shows a stronger indirect effect in comparison to the multiple mediation comprising of both intergroup threat and system justification, which is consistent with the previous study conducted in the UK. However, unlike the previous study, I found that national identification is also associated with realistic threat, $\beta$ = .40, *SE* = .06, *p* < .001, [0.296, 0.512], meaning that people who identify more strongly with the country also tend to perceive immigrants as a potential real threat to the country. However, realistic threat was not associated with either system justification, $\beta$ = -.54, *SE* = .35, *p* = .123, [-1.223, 0.145], nor leader legitimacy, $\beta$ = .13, *SE* = .26, *p* = .617, [-0.372, 0.628].

Table 16. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of National identity and Intergroup threat (Symbolic and Realistic threat) predicting System justification and Leader Legitimacy (Study 8).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* |
| 1. National Identity | 0.41 [0.298, 0.526] | .<.001 | 0.40 [0.296, 0.512] | <.001 | 0.58 [0.479, 0.687] | <.001 | 0.03 [-0.090, 0.150] | .615 |
| 2. Symbolic Threat | / | / | 0.94 [0.907, 0.981] | <.001 | 0.78 [0.084, 1.480] | .028 | 0.38 [-0.142, 0.896] | .156 |
| 3. Realistic Threat | | | / | / | -0.54 [-1.233, 0.145] | .123 | 0.13 [-0.372, 0.628] | .617 |
| 4. System Justification | | | | | | | 0.35 [0.197, 0.495] | <.001 |
| 5. Leader Legitimacy | | | | | | | / | / |

### 5.2.3 Discussion

The findings for Study 8 are generally consistent with my hypothesis and demonstrate a clear psychological process of the antecedents of leader legitimacy. Specifically, results showed that Americans who more strongly identify with the USA, generally perceive immigrants as a threat to the country (both realistically and symbolically). Furthermore, participants with higher perceptions of symbolic threat, also leaned towards greater system justification which, in turn, resulted in more legitimization of Trump as a leader. Indeed, I found a significant psychological process that explains how strongly identified US citizens tend to legitimize more the US president, through perceptions of symbolic threat and consequent motivation to defend the system. Although highly identified US citizens also perceive immigrants as a real threat to the country, this did not associate with either system justification or leader legitimacy. This may be due, unlike the UK, there is not a salient situation in which its possible to 'kick' immigrants out of the country. Instead, it may be more the case that these immigrants pose a more symbolic threat due to the diverse cultural shock between the typical American citizen vs. a wide range of potential immigrants' cultures. However, it is important to note that the indirect effect cause by symbolic threat, albeit significant, was small. In comparison to a model in which only system justification mediates the relationship between national identity and leader legitimacy, the indirect effect is significantly larger. As such, it may be possible that system justification is the most meaningful (and proximal) predictor of leader legitimacy, followed by the (distal) predictor of national identification. Although the previous studies shed light on the psychological process behind the legitimization of controversial leaders, the cross-sectional design of Studies 7 and 8 do not allow us to confirm the direction of the observed relationships (i.e., national identification on intergroup threat). Study 9 addressed this limitation by including a time gap between the predictor and the mediators.

## 5.3 Study 9 – UK Boris Johnson[9]

In study 9, I additionally measured prejudicial attitudes towards outgroups (i.e. immigrants) as an attempt to understand the effects of legitimising leaders that defend strict measures on immigration on prejudice towards immigrants. In this sense, I propose an extension to our model, in which prejudicial attitudes are the final outcome of the process of legitimization of controversial leaders. Taking into account the findings from both previous studies, I will first test our initial hypothesised model and verify which variables best explains leader legitimacy. After, I will proceed to include the new measure of prejudicial attitudes as the final outcome variable for our model. The final model to be tested will be selected depending on the obtained findings from the first model. For example, if results for this study support the model: national identification predicts system justification which, in turn, predicts leader legitimacy; then I will test a respective second model, in which we add prejudicial attitudes as the dependent measure following leader legitimacy.

### 5.3.1 Method

**Procedure and participants**. Participants were asked to complete an online study in two different time points, 6 months apart, about UK citizens' perceptions regarding current social-political issues in the UK. The study was conducted via Prolific and 500 participants completed the survey in Wave 1 (shortly after Johnson was appointed as PM); 352 responded at follow-up (after Johnson won the 2019 General Elections; 6 months after Wave 1), with 8 participants removed because they failed the attention checks. Thus, the final sample at time 2 consisted of 344 participants (94 men, 248 women, and 2 reported as 'other'), aged from 18 to 81 years old ($M$ = 37.94; $SD$ = 13.04), who completed both Waves 1 and 2 (pre and post-

[9] The data from this study is part of a larger data set (shared with Study 6).

elections). Participants all reported being British, with the majority of participants indicating they were White (91.9%), followed by Asian (4.4%), Mixed/multiple ethnic groups (2.6%), and Black (1.2%). In the 2019 General Elections, 41.3% of our sample reported voting for the Labour Party ($n$ = 142), 25.3% for the Conservative Party ($n$ = 87), 9.6% for the Liberal Democrat Party ($n$ = 33), 4.1% for the SNP ($n$ = 14), 5.2% for the Green Party ($n$ = 18), 0.9% for the Brexit Party ($n$ = 3), 1.2% for an unspecified party ($n$ = 4), 3.5% did not reveal who they voted for ($n$ = 12), and 7.8% did not vote ($n$ = 27). I also asked participants' vote regarding Brexit: 28.5% voted Leave ($n$ = 98), 58.1% voted Remain ($n$ = 200), 12.2% did not vote ($n$ = 42), and 1.2% preferred not to say ($n$ = 0.4%). A priori power analysis with $\alpha = .05$ revealed that a minimum sample size of 233 was required to afford 80% power to detect effect sizes of $r$ = .25 for Structural Equation Modelling (Soper, 2020) with the respective parameters for the hypothesised model of this study

**Measures**

I used the same measures as Study 7 (adapted to the 2019 UK General Elections context and directed towards Boris Johnson, where applicable) to measure National identification (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$, W2, $\alpha = .91$), Symbolic threat (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$, W2, $\alpha = .88$), Realistic threat (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$, W2, $\alpha = .92$), System justification (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$, W2, $\alpha = .85$), and Leader legitimacy (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$, W2, $\alpha = .97$). In this study, I have also added a new measure of prejudicial attitudes.

**Prejudicial attitudes** was measured by asking participants to indicate the degree to which they felt the following reactions towards immigrants in 12 bipolar items (*1 = No Hostility, No Dislike, No Disregard, No Rejection, No Hatred, No Superiority, No Acceptance, No Approval, No Warmth, No Admiration, No Affection, No Sympathy; 7 = Extreme Hostility, Extreme Dislike, Extreme Disregard, Extreme Rejection, Extreme Hatred, Extreme Superiority, Extreme Acceptance, Extreme Approval, Extreme Warmth, Extreme*

*Admiration, Extreme Affection, Extreme Sympathy*) from the W. G. Stephan, Ybarra, Martnez, Schwarzwald, and Tur-Kaspa (1998)' Prejudicial Attitudes scale. As expected, a Principal Components Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation showed that the 12 items saturated on two components (positive and negative prejudicial attitudes), consistent in both time points, explaining a total of 78.16.%, and 77.47% of variance, respectively. Thus, I divided the scale between the Positive prejudicial attitudes (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$, W2, $\alpha = .93$) and negative prejudicial attitudes (W1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$, W2, $\alpha = .95$).

### 5.3.2 Results

Table 17 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in this study. Before investigating my hypotheses, I used Mplus 7.4 to conduct longitudinal metric invariance testing to check whether the measurement model with the new variables (national identification, symbolic threat, realistic threat, and both positive and negative prejudicial attitudes) remained stable over time. Specifically, I compared a longitudinal measurement model with freely estimated parameters with a model in which factor loadings of parallel indicators were constrained to be equal over time (i.e., defined to be invariant) (cf., T. A. Brown, 2015). A Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square difference test (appropriate for MLR estimators) showed no significant differences between the constrained, $\chi^2$ (2062) = 4952.227, $p < .001$, and unconstrained model, $\chi^2$ (2034) = 4912.424, $p < .001$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 31.37$, $df = 28$, $p = .301$, ensuring that the factors maintained structural integrity over the two waves, thus achieving metric invariance.

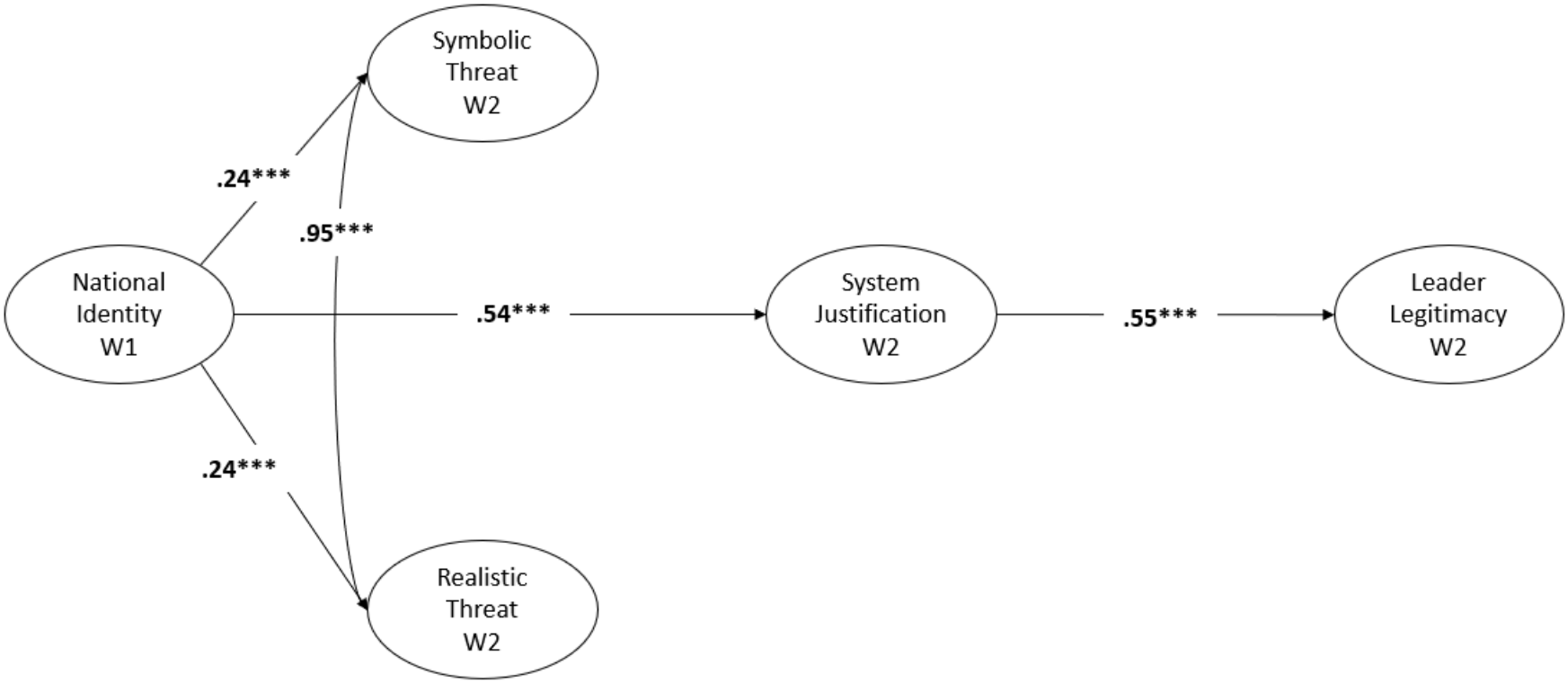
Table 17. *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables (Study 9).*

| | *M* (*SD*) | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. National Identity (W1) | 4.94 (1.21) | .197*** | .204*** | .514*** | .377*** | .186** | -.123* |
| 2. Symbolic Threat (W2) | 3.88 (1.16) | – | .843*** | .221*** | .473*** | .662*** | -.664*** |
| 3. Realistic Threat (W2) | 3.39 (1.31) | | – | .255*** | .502*** | .605*** | -.663*** |
| 4. System Justification (W2) | 3.48 (1.17) | | | – | .604*** | .187*** | -.194*** |
| 5. Leader Legitimacy (W2) | 3.01 (1.78) | | | | – | .357*** | -.400*** |
| 6. Negative Prejudice (W2) | 2.01 (1.16) | | | | | – | -.640*** |
| 7. Positive Prejudice (W2) | 4.72 (1.25) | | | | | | – |

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

After confirming metric invariance, I ran a Confirmatory Factor Analysis testing on the main measurement model  with our six sets of multi-item scales; loading 31 items onto 5 latent factors (6 national identification, 7 symbolic threat; 8 realistic threat; 6 system justification; and 4 leader legitimacy). This model shows adequate fit: $\chi^2(839) = 1776.341$, $\chi 2 / df = 2.12$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = .91, TFI = .91, SRMR = .06.

*Figure 8.* Associations (standardized estimates) of national identity (W1) on leader legitimacy (W2), via intergroup threat (W2, symbolic and realistic threat) and system justification (W2) (Study 9).




*$p$ < .05, **$p$ < .01, ***$p$ < .001

I then tested our hypothesis using the same structural equation model as in Studies 7 and 8; see Figure 8 (full model results are presented in Table 18). Specifically, first I regressed both symbolic threat and realistic threat onto national identification; second, I regressed system justification onto both symbolic threat, realistic threat and national identification; third, I regressed leader legitimacy onto system justification, symbolic threat, realistic threat, and national identification.

Results were partly consistent with my expectations, in the sense that I found a significant positive indirect effect between national identification and leader legitimacy, through system justification, $\beta = .30$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, [0.208, 0.392]. Specifically, the data shows that participants with a stronger national identity also perceive higher the system as more just, $\beta = .54$, $SE = .05$, $p = .028$, [0.446, 0.642] which, in turn, is associated with a greater ascribed legitimacy for Boris as a leader, $\beta = .55$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$, [0.432, 0.672]. These findings were consistent across all studies. Furthermore, similar to Study 7, I found that national identification is associated with both symbolic threat, $\beta = .25$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$, [0.123, 0.369], and realistic threat, $\beta = .24$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$, [0.125, 0.357], meaning that people who identify more strongly with the country also tend to perceive immigrants both as a potential real threat to the country or a more symbolic one. However, in this study, neither of the intergroup threat variables was associated with the dependent variables, thus showing no mediator effect of either type of intergroup threat. Specifically, symbolic threat was not associated with either system justification, $\beta = -.20$, $SE = .27$, $p = .454$, [-0.739, 0.331], or leader legitimacy, $\beta = .28$, $SE = .19$, $p = .153$, [-0.102, 0.654]; nor was realistic threat with system justification, $\beta = .33$, $SE = .26$, $p = .454$, [-0.182, 0.848], or leader legitimacy, $\beta = .12$, $SE = .20$, $p = .537$, [-0.266, 0.510]. Although both intergroup threat variables are likely to be strong predictors of prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants, the main interest of this research consists in studying the process of how the support for

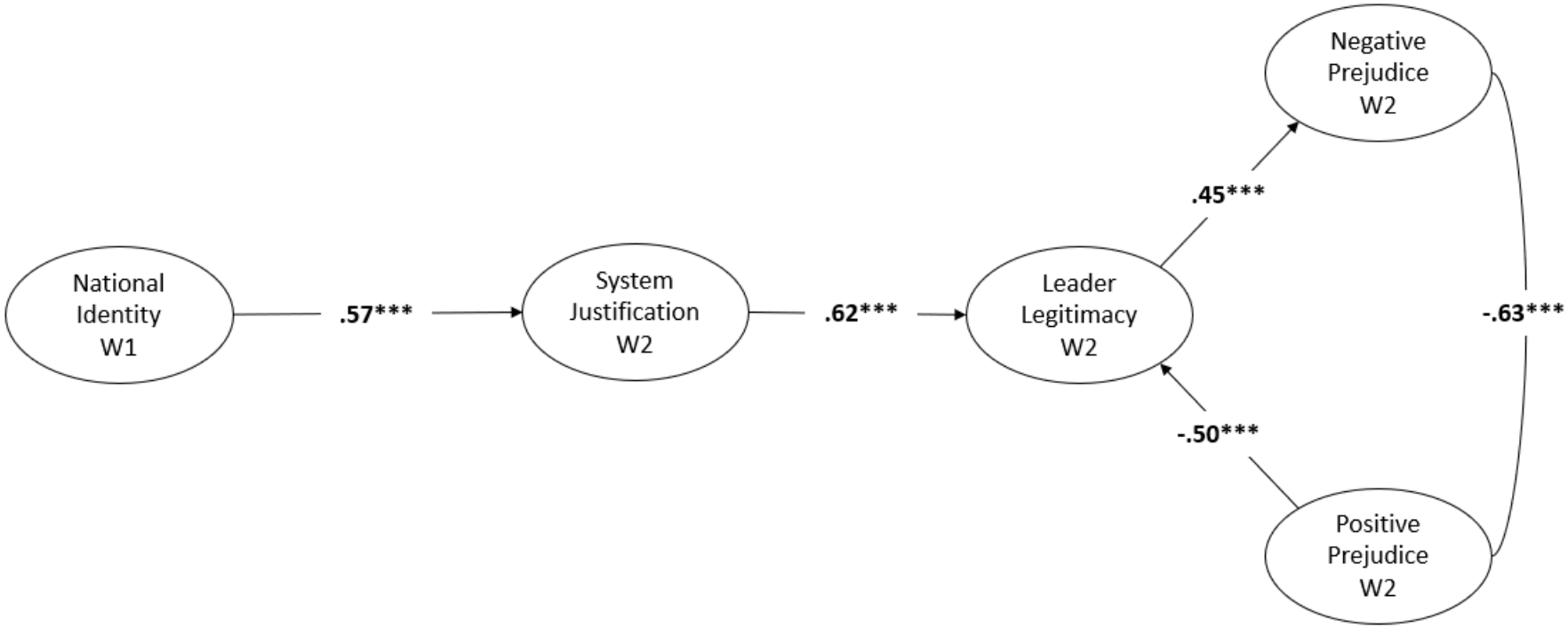
controversial leadership transforms into potential negative attitudes towards outgroups. Across the three studies and its respective models, there is a strong linear association between national identification, system justification, and leader legitimacy. With this in mind, I conducted a cross-lagged model to test the causality of the observed direction between these three variables (see appendix C2). The cross-lagged model indicates that national identification can be considered a predictor of system justification which, in turn, predicts leader legitimacy. Considering these findings, I continued with my second hypothesis and tested this new model with a new outcome: prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants.

Table 18. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of National identity (W1) and Intergroup threat (W2, Symbolic and Realistic threat) predicting System justification (W2) and Leader Legitimacy (W2) (Study 9).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *β* [CI95] | *p* | *β* [CI95] | *p* | *β* [CI95] | *p* | *β* [CI95] | *p* |
| 1. National Identity (W1) | 0.25 [0.123, 0.369] | .<.001 | 0.24 [0.125, 0.357] | <.001 | 0.54 [0.446, 0.642] | <.001 | 0.01 [-0.114, 0.132] | .887 |
| 2. Symbolic Threat (W2) | / | / | 0.94 [0.916, 0.966] | <.001 | -0.20 [-0.739, 0.331] | .454 | 0.28 [-0.102, 0.654] | .153 |
| 3. Realistic Threat (W2) | | | / | / | 0.33 [-1.182, 0.848] | .204 | 0.12 [-0.266, 0.510] | .537 |
| 4. System Justification (W2) | | | | | | | 0.55 [0.432, 0.672] | <.001 |
| 5. Leader Legitimacy (W2) | | | | | | | / | / |

I then tested a second model using similar structural equation modelling as in Studies 7 and 8, though now with prejudicial attitudes as the final outcome; see Figure 9 (full model results are presented in Table 19). Specifically, first I regressed system justification onto national identification; second, I regressed leader legitimacy onto system justification, and national identification; third, I regressed both positive and negative prejudicial attitudes onto leader legitimacy, system justification, and national identification.

*Figure 9.* Associations (standardized estimates) of national identity (W1) on prejudicial (negative and positive) attitudes towards immigrants (W2), via system justification (W2) and leader legitimacy (W2) (Study 9).




*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Results were consistent with my hypothesis, as results revealed a significant positive indirect effect between national identification and both types of prejudicial attitudes, through system justification and leader legitimacy, sequentially (positive: $\beta$ = -.18, *SE* = .04, $p < .001$, [-0.249, -0.107]; negative: $\beta$ = .16, *SE* = .03, $p < .001$, [0.092, 0.226]). Specifically, the data shows that participants with a stronger national identity also perceive the system as more just, $\beta$ = .57, *SE* = .04, $p < .001$, [0.487, 0.659], which leads to greater perceived legitimacy for Boris as a leader, $\beta$ = .62, *SE* = .06, $p < .001$, [0.496, 0.742], and, in turn, results in both higher negative prejudicial attitudes, $\beta$ = .45, *SE* = .07, $p < .001$, [0.310, 0.584] and lesser positive prejudicial attitudes, $\beta$ = -.50, *SE* = .07, $p < .001$, [-0.636, -0.366] against immigrants.

Table 19. *Results (standardized estimates) for the associations of National identity (W1) predicting System justification (W2), Leader legitimacy (W2) and prejudicial (positive and negative) attitudes (W2) (Study 9).*

| | 2. | | 3. | | 4. | | 5. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* | $\beta$ [$CI_{95}$] | *p* |
| 1. National Identity (W1) | 0.57 [0.487, 0.659] | .<.001 | 0.07 [-0.065, 0.201] | .320 | 0.13 [-0.007, 0.259] | .063 | 0.00 [-0.155, 0.151] | .975 |
| 2. System Justification (W2) | / | / | 0.62 [0.496, 0.742] | <.001 | -0.19 [-0.372, -0.004] | .047 | 0.13 [-0.062, 0.330] | .182 |
| 3. Leader Legitimacy (W2) | | | / | / | 0.45 [0.310, 0.584] | <.001 | -0.50 [-0.636, -0.366] | <.001 |
| 4. Negative Prejudice (W2) | | | | | | | -0.63 [-0.726, -0.534] | <.001 |
| 5. Positive Prejudice (W2) | | | | | | | / | / |

### 5.3.3 Discussion

In Study 9, I attempted to further increase confidence in the reliability and validity of our novel model by adding evidence of causality of the consistent psychological processes found in Studies 7 and 8 regarding the psychological antecedents of system justification and leader legitimacy. The findings from this study are partly consistent with both my expectations and previous studies. Specifically, results showed that national identification significantly predicted system justification, which consequently predicted leader legitimacy. Additionally, as theoretically expected, national identification also predicted both types of intergroup threat – symbolic threat and realistic threat. However, my model revealed that neither type of threat predicted system justification or leader legitimacy. I initially expected a similar finding to Study 7, also conducted in the UK, in which realistic threat would be a meaningful predictor of ascribing legitimacy to controversial leaders, particularly considering the context of Brexit. However, taking into account that the intergroup threat variables used in this model (from wave 2) were measured after Brexit had officially started, then it could be possible that UK citizens felt generally less threatened by immigrants, thus lowering the exceptional need to defend the system (as observed in Study 7). As such, this seems to suggest that intergroup threat perceptions played a generally small role in explaining system justification and leader legitimacy in a post-Brexit context.

For our final model, I added a measure of prejudicial attitudes as a final behavioural outcome of the psychological process behind negative attitudes towards immigrants. Specifically, results showed that national identification is a significant predictor of system justification, which consequently predicts leader legitimacy and, in turn, predicts both positive and negative attitudes towards immigrants. Specifically, the more participants identified with their country, the more they justified the system, the more they legitimized their leader, and ultimately explaining their (positive vs. negative) attitudes towards

immigrants. Indeed, the more participants legitimized these controversial leaders, known for their strict stances on immigration, the more they reported being hostile to immigrants, and the less sympathetic they felt towards them.

### 5.4 General Discussion

Throughout three studies, we investigated the support for controversial leaders in the context of immigration. To achieve this, I used a combination of personality and social factors (Hodson & Dhont, 2015) to explore the psychological process behind intergroup processes and the legitimization of leaders. Overall, across the three studies, results using structural equation modelling revealed one consistent finding: people that more strongly identified with their country, also leaned towards a greater justification of the system and, thus, ascribed more legitimacy to their respective leaders (all known to be strict on immigration). This is consistent with my hypothesis, in which national identification provides a cognitive tool to allow people to justify the system (e.g., Carter, Ferguson, & Hassin, 2011) and, consequently, further legitimizing leaders that demonstrate a status quo rhetoric (e.g., Badaan et al., 2018). However, results revealed that intergroup threat played a lesser role in predicting system justification. Moreover, the direction between national identification and intergroup threat may not be exclusive for this model, though this comprises a new research venue that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. As discussed earlier, the effects of each type of intergroup threat may be heavily dependent on the relevant outgroup and/or context. As such, I will be discussing each study in turn.

In Study 7, I found that system justification mediated the role of national identification on leader legitimacy. This research replicates my previous findings (see chapter IV), in which personal views on how just the world is play a role on the legitimization of leaders that protect the status quo. Further, it demonstrates that relatively stable social factors, such as national identification, may also play a role in the legitimization of controversial

leaders, especially when mediated by system justification. However, neither type of intergroup threat correlated with either national identification or system justification. Interestingly, realistic threat still played an independent role in explaining leader legitimacy, in the sense that participants that perceived immigrants as a potentially real threat to the country, legitimised more Theresa May as their leader. Considering the turmoil in Britain and the uncertain socio-political context of Brexit at the time of the study, and how May had assured the nation that with complete certainty that she would deliver Brexit, it makes sense that the people that believed immigrants to pose a real threat to the country (e.g., taking away the group's resources), would further legitimise May's leadership. This is consistent with recent evidence that demonstrates that realistic threat played an important role in explaining voting intentions for Brexit (Van de Vyver et al., 2018).

In Study 8, I found a significant indirect effect (albeit small) between national identification and leader legitimacy, mediated sequentially by symbolic threat and system justification. In this case, symbolic threat (and not realistic threat) was associated with system justification, which, in turn, was associated with leader legitimacy. In comparison to their UK counterpart, the US was not currently undergoing a concrete process to remove immigrants from the country, such as Brexit. Instead, it could be that American citizens tend to perceive immigrants as more of a symbolic threat, due to the greater separation between cultures and, as such, are more afraid of immigrants potentially harming their ideologies and beliefs system. This finding shares some resemblance to Neuberg and Cottrell (2002)'s research, in which their findings revealed that White Americans associated realistic threat more with African Americans, and symbolic threats with Native Americans. As such, it could be that realistic threat plays a predominant role regarding race/ethnic outgroups, but symbolic threat takes the stage regarding immigration issues. In this case, it would make sense for symbolic threat to play a more significant role in legitimizing Donald Trump's leadership.

Nevertheless, Americans who more strongly identified with the US perceived immigrants as both a real and symbolic threat to the country. To some extent, this finding demonstrates the associated consequences with having high national identification. In fact, collective narcissism – a form of extreme elevated ingroup identification –has been found to predict prejudice towards outgroups, mediated through high sensitivity to intergroup threat (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012).

The final Study 9 revealed partial findings consistent with both previous studies. First, I found the same mediation role of system justification between national identification and leader legitimacy as in both previous studies. Second, and consistent with Verkuyten (2009)'s appraisal, I found a positive association between national identification and both types of intergroup threat as Study 2. However, neither of these threats explained enough variance to predict either system justification or leader legitimacy. Although this study was also conducted in the UK, similarly to Study 1, it seems that realistic threat no longer played a vital role in explaining the legitimization process of Boris Johnson. This could be due to the fact that at the time of the second wave of the study, Boris had successfully advanced with the Brexit vote, potentially disarming British citizens' perceptions of realistic threat by immigrants. In this sense, because Brexit was now inevitable, in the eyes of strongly identified British people, immigrants would no longer pose such a meaningful threat. Naturally, for strongly identified individuals, the status quo would now be restored and, ultimately, this 'victory' only further legitimised Johnson as their respective leader.

To verify this assumption, I tested a final structural equation model with prejudicial attitudes (towards immigrants) as the final outcome of the process of legitimization of Johnson's leadership. Analysis revealed a final model that demonstrated that British citizens that identified more strongly with the country, also believed the system to be more just, which, in turn, legitimized more Johnson as their leader and, ultimately, increased their

negative attitudes towards immigrants. In this sense, our findings provide some evidence that legitimizing leaders who are controversially strict on immigrants paves the way to legitimize people's own (negative) attitudes towards immigrants.

### 5.4.1. Theoretical and practical implications

This research has provided more insight into the understanding of negative intergroup processes, particularly in the context of immigration. Since system justifiers would rather act as 'status quo defenders', they tend to generically make less cognitive effort in understanding the reasoning behind 'status quo challengers' (Robinson & Kray, 2001). As a result, these system justifiers tend to perceive less personal discrimination, which enables them to be more accepting of the system (Olson & Hafer, 2001). In fact, it becomes easier to accept the system when the underlying issues of the country are conveniently redirected towards immigrants and minorities (van der Toorn et al., 2015). This is particularly the case when national identity is more salient, as it promotes stronger justification of inequalities, even from disadvantaged groups (Jaśko & Kossowska, 2013), thus predicting system-justifying beliefs (Sengupta & Sibley, 2013). In the end, this redirection of blame is made possible (and often encouraged) in the presence of leaders who publicly support arguably anti-immigration policies – a rhetoric often used by conservatives – shown to be more system justifying (Kay, Czapliński, & Jost, 2009). Case in point, this rhetoric has been employed by the Conservatives in the UK for the last 10 years (Trilling, 2020). On the other hand, when people adopt a more radical belief system, they start perceiving authorities as illegitimate (Buijs, Demant, & Hamdy, 2006). This would explain why people that are more sensitive to discrimination towards minorities are also the ones who participate more in protests and demanding for change. Interestingly, however, it seems that system justification tends to work against people. Indeed, even though it would seem beneficial for people from middle or lower socioeconomic status to denounce the very social systems and institutions that place

them in a relative disadvantage, it may actually be more psychologically aversive to support leaders who propose radical changes (Azevedo, Jost, & Rothmund, 2017). In the end, it seems that national identification is the answer to understand the conditions in which people are more likely to defend or change the system. Indeed, as national identification increases, so do people's 'blindness' to status inequalities and discrimination of minorities, which is further empowered by the legitimization of leaders that promote a status quo rhetoric. Ultimately, people's negative attitudes towards outgroups will likely match the leader's measures, regardless of how controversial or extreme they may seem, in line with the theorising on transgression credit (Abrams et al., 2013).

## Chapter VI: General conclusions

Research on leadership tends to focus more on the role of the leader, while ignoring the essential role of followers (Rahn Doug, Jawahar, Scrimpshire Alex, & Stone, 2016). Indeed, leadership research seems to generally ignore the fact that leaders also share group membership with their followers, and thus research often underestimates the influence of group dynamics in leadership (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; van Knippenberg, 2011). The research conducted in this thesis aims to broaden our understanding in the psychological processes that may underlie group reactions towards controversial, or even transgressive leaders.

As initially presented in Chapter I, transgressive leadership is often present within various social contexts and often has harmful implications to the groups where it occurs. Although behaviour that deviates from the group's norms is often controlled and punished by the group, through processes of social control (e.g., Levine & Moreland, 1994), it seems that this rule does not always apply when this transgressive member occupies the role of leadership (Abrams et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Indeed, transgressive leaders often benefit from transgression credit, usually translated into a license to violate the group's norms. That is, ingroup leaders may be given leniency to transgress norms that outgroup leaders or ingroup members do not benefit from. That said, this effect seems to be applied only in some leaders, with others being publicly rejected and removed from power after engaging in severe transgressions. Interestingly, it seems that the severity of the transgressions and whether it served the group's interests did not explain the transgression credit effect (Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Therefore, the literature thus far is not clear on whether ingroup leaders are always given transgression credit, or whether there are specific psychological factors at play that may make ingroup members relax moral boundaries when judging their own leaders. To better understand this phenomenon, I explored how followers' perceptions concerning the

legitimacy of the leader affects the extent to which an unethical or controversial leader is given transgression credit.

This work builds on Hollander's theoretical concept of leader legitimacy (Hollander, 2006) and applies it to current developments in leadership theories. Although there is already some research tackling the role of group members in leader-followers dynamics in leader evaluation, such as the social identity theory of leadership (e.g., Hogg, 2001), and the more recent transgression credit framework (e.g., Abrams et al., 2013), we have yet to pinpoint the psychological processes that explain positive vs. negative reactions to transgressive leaders. As such, this work first explored the potential differentiating effects of perceived legitimacy towards transgressive leaders, followed by exploring the antecedents of attributions of legitimacy in real socio-political contexts.

Hollander (1958) first tackles the concept of legitimacy as a fundamental factor for someone to be 'worthy' of leadership. Those who are seen as legitimate, would be able to exert power and influence within the group. According to the idiosyncratic credit model (Hollander, 1958, 2006), leaders are allowed greater latitude for nonconformist behaviour from other members of the group, as long as they have accumulated enough 'credit'. This suggests that they can gain status within the group by demonstrating task-related competence and loyalty to group values (Hollander, 1964; Hollander & Julian, 1970). However, although the concept of legitimacy is not new, there is still insufficient research exploring the process of legitimization of leaders. In fact, Hollander's idiosyncratic credit is generally accrued through direct interactions between leaders and followers, thus not explaining 'larger scale' leader-group relationships (large organisations or political contexts). Further, legitimacy is rarely operationalised and controlled in experimental settings (Yukl, 2006) and lacks a practical application to real leaders, particularly ones that cross moral boundaries. This is important considering that people tend to defer decisions of right or wrong to authorities (Kelman &

Hamilton, 1989). As a result, transgressive behaviour from leaders may promote followers' own transgressive behaviour (M. E. Brown et al., 2005). Brown et al. (2005) suggested that unethical leaders may to an extent be role models of unethical behaviour, which can lead to the spread of unethical behaviour in teams and groups. Therefore, it is important to understand when transgressive leaders' behaviour is normalized, they are not held accountable by their group members (Bauman et al., 2016). On the other hand, research was also unclear about the situations in which elected leaders (i.e. political leaders) severely lose support and are faced with extreme negative reactions due to transgression of moral boundaries.

The goal of this research was to draw from different theoretical approaches to understand group reactions towards leaders that cross moral boundaries. Ultimately, I proposed a new conceptual model in leader-follower dynamics and concluded that legitimacy consists in the basis for group validation and acknowledgment of the person occupying the leadership role (Bass & Bass, 2009; Tyler, 2006). After ascribing legitimacy to the leader, followers are then filled with a greater sense of obligation and duty to comply with the decisions and behaviours from their legitimized leader (Levi et al., 2009; Vial et al., 2016).

### 6.1 Overview of the main findings and theoretical discussion

The first set of studies (Chapter III) empirically tested the role of leader legitimacy in explaining differential group reactions to transgressive leaders. In brief, participants awarded more transgression credit towards transgressive legitimate leaders, in comparison to their illegitimate counterparts (Studies 1-3). Furthermore, the effect of leader legitimacy remained even in the presence (or absence) of social control mechanisms exerted upon the transgressive leader (Study 2), and regardless of the leader's prototypicality (Study 3). Chapter IV explored the antecedent of leader legitimacy by incorporating system justifying beliefs as the predictor of legitimacy perceptions towards various political leaders (Studies 4-6). Specifically, I found that participants with higher system justification, also legitimised

their leaders more, which, in turn, led to more positive perceptions/reactions towards their leaders and their arguably controversial behaviour. Finally, in the last set of studies (Chapter V), I further explored the antecedents of the legitimization of leaders by considering intergroup processes (Studies 7-9). In brief, I found that individual's identification with their country was associated with greater justification for the status quo, which in turn was associated with greater legitimacy to leaders who protect such system (Studies 7-8), ultimately determining participants' negative attitudes towards outgroup members (i.e. immigrants) (Study 9).

Study 1 provided initial support for my attempt to operationalise leader legitimacy in an experimental setting through the use of experimental vignettes. The experimental scenarios were developed based on a combination of Hollander's perspective on leader legitimacy with various other pieces of similar research highlighting relevant attributes to the concept of legitimacy (e.g., Ratcliff & Vescio, 2017; Tyler, 2006; Vial et al., 2016). The results clearly showed that participants' perceptions of legitimacy mirrored the presented (il)legitimate leaders, respectively. Furthermore, transgressive legitimate leaders were perceived as less threat to the group and warranted less agreement with formal punishment, in comparison to illegitimate leaders.

Study 2 replicated the findings from the previous study and further explored the importance of social control mechanisms in the presence of transgressive leadership. In this study, participants were faced with a scenario in which a transgressive (il)legitimate leader would either be punished by the authorities or absolved from any legal consequences. Interestingly, results only revealed a significant effect of leader legitimacy in group reactions towards the transgressive leader, in the sense that the behaviour from transgressive legitimate leaders was more validated by participants, elicited lower negative emotions (i.e. anger and shame), and raised less agreement with collective protest. Further, it seems that participants

even demonstrated lower credibility in the formal social control systems when faced with a transgressive legitimate leader. Indeed, these results demonstrate that legitimate leaders are 'worthy' of a full transgression credit when engaging in morally questionable behaviour.

Study 3 investigated the potential interaction of leader legitimacy with leader prototypicality. Considering the central role of leader prototypicality in the social identity theory of leadership framework (for a review, Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003), it became necessary to investigate how this concept would interact with leader legitimacy. Indeed, both concepts have shown to play a role in leader-group dynamics, particularly on the support vs. rejection of potential leaders (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001). In a way, although this distinction might be possible on a certain theoretical level, one might argue that the differences between these constructs might be hard to achieve on an operational level (e.g., a leader who is prototypical is also perceived as legitimate, and vice versa). In fact, recent work (Abrams et al., 2018) suggests that prototypicality allows leaders to accrue deviance credit and that occupying the leadership position endows leaders with the right to lead. This would then suggest that being prototypical should garner deviance credit and being in a leadership position should also endow leaders with legitimacy (and the right to lead) almost irrespective of their transgressions. Therefore, I presented a study in which both variables are experimentally manipulated in an attempt to observe any potential interaction or independent effects. Once again, the results only revealed a main effect of leader legitimacy on several group reactions towards transgressive leaders. The absence of significant effects deriving from leader prototypicality may have been obscured by the greater effect of leader legitimacy. However, one might argue that the effect of leader legitimacy was stronger (or more salient) than the leader prototypicality manipulation. To more clearly determine the predominance of each effect, further research is necessary. However, this study provides

further support to the key role that legitimacy plays in explaining reactions to transgressive leadership.

Throughout the research programme, several social political events happened that presented unique opportunities to test the conceptual model in real-life scenarios. This was important to test the ecological validity of the model, following the experimental the work conducted in the first three studies. Study 4 presented a novel insight to the psychological process of supporting controversial leaders, specifically applied to the context of the 2016 US elections and the then recently elected President Trump. Building on the accumulated evidence from Chapter III regarding the role of leader legitimacy, I argued that attributions of legitimacy are an important part of the psychological mechanism behind the support of controversial leaders. In this sense, leader legitimacy was presented as a proximal predictor of differing (positive vs. negative) group reactions towards Donald Trump's leadership. Furthermore, I also observed that system justification was strongly associated with leader legitimacy, in the sense that people with greater tendency to support the system would also support their respective leaders (particularly as these leaders are also interested in maintaining the status quo). Specifically, higher leader legitimacy was associated with higher perceived ethicality, and higher validation of Trump's behaviour; while low leader legitimacy was associated with feelings of group threat, and negative emotions towards the new leader.

Study 5 further replicated the previous results by recreating a similar conceptual model in the political context of the 2017 UK elections, which shared some parallels of political controversy. As expected, the results showed that system justification acted as a distal predictor of both negative (negative emotions via group threat) and positive (validation of leader behaviour via leader ethicality) reactions to controversial leaders, mediated by perceptions of leader legitimacy regarding Theresa May. In sum, the more participants justified the system, the more they perceived the leader to be legitimate, and higher positive

(leader ethicality and validation of behaviour) and lower negative (group threat and negative emotions) reactions.

Study 6 replicated the previous models through the use of a mediation with temporal separation of the predictor and the mediator in the context of the 2019 UK elections (and the then recently elected Boris Johnson), so that it would be possible to confirm the direction of the observed relationships between system justification and leader legitimacy. Indeed, the same psychological processes found in Studies 5 and 6 regarding the psychological antecedents of the support for controversial leaders further increased the confidence in the reliability and validity of our novel conceptual model. In the end, results showed that system justification was a significant predictor of leader legitimacy, which consequently was associated with both negative (negative emotions via group threat) and positive (validation of leader behaviour via leader ethicality) reactions to controversial leaders.

In Chapter V, I have explored how these processes may play out in terms of intergroup relations, and prejudice towards outgroup members. Study 7 further explored the potential antecedents of system justification and legitimization of controversial leaders, by testing the roles of national identification and intergroup threat (i.e. symbolic threat and realistic threat) as predictors of leader legitimacy. Although I did not find any association between intergroup threat with the other variables, the test across studies was important given that importance of realistic and symbolic threat seems to vary across countries. Results revealed that people who identified more strongly with the country, also leaned towards higher justification of the system, and attributing higher legitimacy to their leader – Theresa May. In short, this study demonstrated consistent findings with the previous studies (in chapter IV) regarding the role of system justification in the legitimization of controversial leaders, but it also revealed the importance of national identification for maintaining the system and legitimizing its respective leaders. Additionally, in this context of undergoing

Brexit, I found a direct association between realistic threat and leader legitimacy, in the way that people ascribed more legitimacy to May, due to their increased perceptions of immigrants as potential threats to the country. As discussed previously, this predominant role of realistic threat may be due to the uncertainty surrounding Brexit, in which British citizens may have felt 'realistic' threat of immigrants (e.g., stealing jobs or resources.), thus promoting a leader who confidently promised the successful deliverance of Brexit.

Study 8 generally demonstrated consistent findings with our initial hypothesis regarding the underlying psychological process of the antecedents of leader legitimacy. In this study applied in the US, during Trump's presidency, American citizens who more strongly identify with their country, also perceived immigrants as a higher threat to the country (both realistically and symbolically), further leaning towards greater system justification of the system, which, in turn, was associated with more legitimization of Trump. Unlike the previous study, I found that perceptions of symbolic threat were associated with participants' motivation to defend the system. Although national identification increased US citizens' both types of intergroup threat, it seems that only symbolic threat was associated with system justification, and indirectly with leader legitimacy. It is possible that in this context, the cultural difference 'typical' American citizens and other immigrants' cultures might have been more salient at the current social-political context. However, this effect is considered small, especially in comparison to the significantly larger indirect effect of system justification as a mediator of the relationship between national identity and leader legitimacy. As such, we believe that, consistently with Study 6, system justification is the most meaningful (and closest) predictor of leader legitimacy, followed by the (distal) predictor of national identification.

Study 9 further shed light on the psychological process of legitimization of controversial leaders by using a temporal separation between the predictor and the mediator

to inform on the direction of the observed effects over time. Overall, the findings were consistent with our expectations. Specifically, results showed that national identification significantly predicted system justification, which consequently was associated with leader legitimacy (same as Studies 7 and 8). Furthermore, national identification was also significantly associated with both types of intergroup threat – symbolic threat and realistic threat (Same as Study 8). However, unlike Study 7 (also conducted in the UK), intergroup threat was not associated with system justification or leader legitimacy. This might be due to the fact that Brexit had been successfully approved by the time of Study 9's wave 2. As such, UK citizens that supported the status quo (and presumably supportive of Brexit) felt generally less threatened by immigrants. Regardless, this finding revealed that intergroup threat perceptions played a fairly small role in explaining system justification and leader legitimacy in a post-Brexit context. In this study, we further tested how the legitimization of controversial leaders might also legitimize the participants' own attitudes towards immigrants. As such, I tested and found that prejudicial attitudes (both positive and negative) were the final outcome of our conceptual model of legitimization of controversial leaders. In sum, the higher national identification, the more participants justified the system, the more they legitimised their leader and, consequently, in which was associated with greater (report of) hostility to immigrants, and less sympathy felt towards them.

### 6.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

The present research provided the first experimental test for the assumption that follower perceptions of legitimacy towards leaders have a significant impact on how the leader's behaviour is interpreted, particularly when their behaviour is morally transgressive (Studies 1-3). Indeed, the evidence presented suggests that the group seems to enter a validation process of the legitimate leader's misconduct, resulting in more credit for moral transgressions. The purpose of this research was to shed some light on the reasoning behind why some leaders

are pressured to resign from their position after their misconducts become public, while others are allowed to remain in office. Consequently, difference responses ranging from acceptance and validation of the transgression behaviour to feelings of treat to the group and adoption of informal punitive reactions are adopted by the group towards the transgressive leaders. To achieve this, we focused on the use of experimental vignettes (e.g., Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), as it allowed us to more directly test our key research questions and operationalise the concept of leader legitimacy. Naturally, these manipulations are not without flaws, and may be subject to critique. Although our manipulations were based on previous research tackling the concept of leader legitimacy, some may argue that our concept confounds with other potential variables, particular with "good leader" traits, such that a highly legitimate leader is more competent and is simply an overall better leader than that the illegitimate leader.

The present manipulation of legitimacy consisted in two parts: 1) leader emergence (or selection by employees/peers) vs. leader appointment and the granting of leadership; 2) Combination of positive (vs. negative) traits and interactions with the group. Although previous research has equated leader selection by peers with granting of leadership (Ben-Yoav et al., 1983; Hollander & Julian, 1970; Julian et al., 1969), in most workplaces, leaders are appointed and not elected. In fact, the notion that a president of a company was elected by employees or peers is unrealistic. Naturally, leaders can be appointed, and still be granted leadership. Because of this, I adjusted our scenarios to more public organisations in an attempt to create a more realistic scenario. Nevertheless, I argue that the process behind leader selection is not the only factor contributing to one's legitimacy. That is, in an attempt to pin down the factor of leader legitimacy, I focused on positive impressions/interactions between the leader and 'other group members' (Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009), along with other relevant traits, such as trust and competence (Hollander, 2009; Julian et al., 1969; Shapiro et al., 2011). In fact, even the manipulation check of leader legitimacy might conflate

perceptions of purely trust and perceptions legitimacy (granting of leadership). While related, they are not necessarily the same. In that regard, the concept of leader legitimacy might share similarities with other relevant concepts in leadership research. Future research should focus on a more detailed conceptualization to explore these differences.

Nevertheless, this research was conducted in several countries (Portugal, UK and USA), and consistently demonstrated a similar legitimacy effect. This provides a certain level of confidence in the robustness of the hypothesised model. After manipulating leader legitimacy, we moved from an organisational setting to real life political scenarios in the following chapters. Naturally, it would be quite hard (if not impossible) to manipulate already pre-conceived ideas regarding existing (and well-known) leaders. As such, I focused on correlational and longitudinal studies, in which I could observe potential associations between the measured form of leader legitimacy and other well-known theoretical concepts. I am conscious that given that the correlational studies focussed on reactions to specific, well-known leaders, they may raise some questions around replicability or the nature of the transgressions or comparability of the level of controversy of each leader. However, given that results revealed similar patterns across these studies, they further support the model proposed in this thesis. Importantly, the combination of methods employed in this programme of research provides a certain degree of confidence in the importance of the psychological processes proposed and tested.

Another issue of this research regards to the framing or more specifically the nature of leaders' controversial/transgressive behaviour. Because deviation from group norms can take on many forms, it is fairly difficult to find a general term comprises all types of potential misconduct, without going beyond the scope of the obtained findings. In Chapter III, based on previous research in the transgression credit framework, we developed our leaders to display behaviour that transgressed moral norms, portrayed as dishonest and immoral

behaviour, with a negative direct impact in the group' wellbeing (Hoyt et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). In this sense, transgressive behaviour is a term often observed and attributed in organisational settings (Shapiro et al., 2011). However, judging transgressive behaviour in political scenarios is a more sensitive matter. Indeed, we cannot simply assume that existing political leaders have displayed transgressive behaviour in political scenarios (regardless of one's opinions). As such, I decided to present the concept of controversial leadership, meaning leaders who elicit either extreme support or extreme rejection from their group. However, I may have also indirectly equated controversial leaders to connotations of endorsing extreme conservative or traditional immigration policies. Indeed, in chapters IV and V, I present 3 leaders that have raised significant controversy, particularly on their strict stance towards immigration. However, it is important to note that although all three leaders in our studies are conservative, I admit that liberal leaders can be equally controversial. Case in point, Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party were targeted for anti-Semitism, ultimately leading towards several Labour members leaving the party.

The previous point raises an issue of generalizability of our model. Considering the political nature of the presented studies, we cannot be entirely confident that the observed process of legitimization of controversial leaders would be similar for liberal leaders. Indeed, we may quite possibly observe something entirely different. For instance, would system justification be more likely to have the opposite relationship with support toward Alexandria Ocasio Cortez? Considering how AOC is rapidly taking the public stage in the liberal political aisle, known for her direct outspoken attitude towards system injustice, would high system justifiers view her as less legitimate and, therefore, less likely to validate her behaviour? In this case, we might actually expect that only people that perceive injustice within the group and feel personally motivated to change the system (low on system justification), would be active supports of leaders like AOC. The recent escalation of the

BLM movement might have boosted the support for the recently elected president Joe Biden and vice-president Kamala Harris, in the hopes for a major shift in the status quo. In this sense, to ascertain the generalization of our theoretical model, it would be important to test if the observed effects would replicate in feelings toward liberal leaders, particularly considering the link between political conservatism and system justifying beliefs. This also raises an interesting point between party membership (and loyalty) and support for their respective leaders. Recent research demonstrated that unethical behaviour becomes more acceptable from successful leaders, as it equates to ingroup success as well (Morais, Abrams, & Randsley de Moura, 2020). In this sense, it may be easier for a 'relaxation' of ethical standards when party members perceive their ingroup to benefit from unethical leadership. Future research could explore the potential moderating role of party membership between system justification and the legitimization of unethical leaders.

On a final note, considering how groups are more likely to engage in collective forms of action (i.e. collective protest) towards transgressive illegitimate leaders (Chapter III), and how perceptions of leader legitimacy seem to originate in system justifying ideologies (Chapter IV), one could assume that status quo challengers would be willing to engage in collective action to actively change the system, particularly when facing illegitimate leaders. Although topically relevant, research exploring the association between system justification and collective action is still largely neglected (Jost, Becker, et al., 2017). Albeit indirectly, this thesis suggests some evidence regarding this link, mediated by leader legitimacy. Specifically, Chapter III demonstrated that people were willing to engage in collective protest towards transgressive illegitimate leaders. Moreover, Chapter IV showed evidence that system justifiers ascribe more legitimacy to leaders typically protective of the system. In this sense, one could expect that system challengers would refuse to legitimize leaders protective of the system, thus promoting behaviour to actively change that system through collective

action (i.e. collective protest). We can draw some parallels from the present new wave of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, in which people are fighting to change status inequalities, by collectively challenging authorities and actively making them accountable for their transgressions. This could be particularly explained due to people (sensitive to race/ethnic status qualities) no longer acknowledging authorities as the legitimate protectors of the group. As such, future research could explore the potentially mediating role of leader legitimacy between system justification and collective action.

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# APPENDICES

## **Appendix A –** Measures

**National Identification** (adapted from Abrams et al., 1998) – Studies 1-3

Indicate your agreement with each statement (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree):

1) Being (nationality) is important to define who I am.
2) (Nationality) citizens are valuable people.
3) I am glad to have been born in (country).
4) I am proud to be (nationality).

**Perceived Legitimacy** – Studies 1-3 (Manipulation check)

I believe that (leader) is (in a 7-item bipolar scale):

- 1 = Untrustworthy; Illegitimate; Not credible; Not Acknowledged.
- 7 = Trustworthy, Legitimate, Credible, and Acknowledged.

**Group Threat** – Studies 1-3

To what extent do you believe that (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree):

1) This individual jeopardizes the country.
2) These situations threaten our country's image.
3) The content of this news report undermines my confidence in the (country)'s political system.

**Formal Punishment** – Studies 1-3

To what extent do you agree that the following actions should be implemented towards (leader) (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree):

1) (Leader) should keep his job as the (country)'s leading representative indefinitely.
2) Authorities should carry out an audit of the activities of the (leader) and the accounts of the (organisation).
3) The responsible authorities should initiate disciplinary proceedings against (leader).
4) (Leader) should be demoted from the (organisation), though still allowed to work as a member of the staff.
5) (Leader) should be removed from the (organisation).
6) The responsible authorities should open a criminal case against (leader).

**Perceived Effectiveness of Social Control** (adapted from Pinto et al., 2016) – Study 2 (Manipulation check)

In your opinion, how do you evaluate the Attorney-General's decision regarding this case (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree):

1) I believe in the efficacy of the Attorney General to deal with this case.
2) The Attorney General's decision in dealing with this decision was fair and appropriate.
3) The course of action taken by the Attorney General was responsible and in compliance with its duties.

**Validation of Leader's Behaviour** (based on Vala et al., 2011) – Studies 2-3

How do you evaluate the actions of (leader) (in a 7-item bipolar scale):

- 1 = Unnecessary; Not valid; Unacceptable; Unjustifiable.
- 7 = Necessary; Valid; Acceptable; Justifiable

**Negative Emotions** – Studies 2-3

When thinking of people like (leader) occupying important leadership roles (such as this organisation), how do you feel (in a 7-item bipolar scale):

- 1 = No Shame; No Anger.
- 7 = A lot of Shame; A lot of Anger.

**Collective Protest** (based on Machado et al., 2011) – Studies 2-3

As a (nationality) citizen, would you participate in any of the following movements? (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree):

1) Help organize a petition to limit (leader)'s decisive power within the (organisation).
2) Participate in raising our collective voice demanding (leader) to be fired from the (organisation).
3) Participate in an organized rally to force (leader) to be removed from office.
4) I would campaign on social media to raise awareness regarding (leader)'s transgressions.

**Perceived Prototypicality** (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001) – Study 3 (Manipulation check)

As a leader, would you say that (leader) (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree):

1) Represents what is characteristic about (nationality) citizens.
2) Is representative of (nationality) citizens.
3) Is a good example for (nationality) citizens.
4) Stands for what (nationality) citizens have in common.
5) Is not representative of (nationality) citizens in general (reversed-coded).
6) Is very similar to most people in the (country).

**System Justification** (Kay & Jost, 2003) – Studies 4-9

1) In general, I find society to be fair.
2) In general, the (country)'s political system operates as it should.
3) The (country) is the best country in the world to live in.
4) Most policies serve the greater good.
5) Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness.
6) Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.

**Leader Legitimacy** – Studies 4-9

Considering what you know about (leader), what do you think of (him/her) as the next leader for the (country) (in a 7-item bipolar scale):

- 1 = Untrustworthy; Not credible; Unfair; Incompetent.
- 7 = Trustworthy, Credible, Fair, and Competent.

**Ethical Behaviour** – Studies 4-6

To what extent do you think that these comments and actions:

- 1 = Are totally unethical; Clearly break rules; Clearly demonstrate a lack of integrity.
- 7 = Are totally ethical, Do not break any rules, Clearly demonstrate integrity.

**Validation of Leader's Behaviour** – Studies 4-6

In general, how do you evaluate (leader)'s behaviour: (in a 7-item bipolar scale):

- 1 = Unnecessary; Not valid; Unacceptable; Unjustifiable.
- 7 = Necessary, Very valid, Acceptable, and Justifiable.

**Group Threat** (Kay & Jost, 2003) – Studies 4-6

1) (Leader) is harmful to our country.
2) (Leader) threatens the image of our country.
3) (Leader) weakens my confidence on our political system.

**Negative Emotions** – Studies 4-6

How do you feel regarding (leader) as the leader of the (country) (in a 7-item bipolar scale):

- 1 = No Shame; No Disappointment; No Anger; No Sadness.
- 7 = A lot of Shame; A lot of Disappointment; A lot of Anger; A lot of Sadness.

**National Identification** (Duriez et al., 2013) – Studies 7-9

1) I feel (nationality).
2) Being (nationality) is important to define who I am.
3) I am proud to be (nationality).
4) I feel strong ties/a bond with (nationality) citizens.
5) In many ways, I resemble other (nationality) citizens.
6) I consider myself a typical (nationality) citizen.

**Symbolic Threat** (W. G. Stephan et al., 1999) – Studies 7-9

1) Immigrants should learn to conform to the rules and norms of the (country) society as soon as possible after they arrive.
2) Immigration is undermining the (country)'s culture.
3) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of most (nationality) citizens (reverse-coded).
4) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most (nationality) citizens.
5) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding family issues and socializing children are basically quite similar to those of most (nationality) citizens (reverse-coded).
6) The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding social relations are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most (nationality) citizens.
7) Immigrants should not have to accept the (country) ways (reverse-coded).

**Realistic Threat** (W. G. Stephan et al., 1999) – Studies 7-9

1) Immigrants get more from this country than they contribute.
2) The children of immigrants should have the same right to attend public schools in the (country) as (nationality) citizens do (reverse-coded).
3) Immigration has increased the tax burden on (nationality) citizens.
4) Immigrants are not displacing (country)'s workers from their jobs (reverse-coded)
5) Immigrants should be eligible for the same health-care benefits received by (nationality) citizens (reverse-coded).
6) Social services have become less available to (nationality) citizens because of immigration.
7) The quality of social services available to (nationality) citizens has remained the same, despite immigration (reverse-coded).

8) Immigrants are as entitled to subsidized housing or subsidized utilities (water, sewage, electricity) as poor (nationality) citizens are (reverse-coded).

## **Appendix B –** Scenarios

**Leader Legitimacy manipulation** – Studies 1-3

**Legitimate condition**

(Leader) was recently elected by absolute majority as the (country)'s leading representative of the (organisation), whose responsibility is to oversee and make vital decisions on health policies which, in turn, have a strong impact on Health care of the (country). Several co-workers and staff members from the (organisation) working under (leader) hold him in high regard and have high expectations for his performance.

Here are some comments from co-workers:

*"(Leader) was a great bet on our part".*

*"He has shown to be very successful on his past work, so we truly believe in him".*

Accordingly, a recent poll involving (country) citizens included comments like:

*"He earned our trust (...) (Leader) seems to make understandable and reasonable decisions".*

*"We give him credibility due to his past, and we know we can count on him".*

**Illegitimate condition**

(Leader) was recently appointed by the government as the (country)'s leading representative of the (organisation), whose responsibility is to oversee and make vital decisions on health policies which, in turn, have a strong impact on Health care of the (country). Several co-workers and staff members from the (organisation) working under (leader) do not hold him in high regard and have low expectations for his performance.

Here are some comments from co-workers:

*"(Leader) was a terrible bet on our part".*

*"He has shown to be very unsuccessful on his past work, so we do not believe in him at all".*

Accordingly, a recent poll involving (country) citizens included comments like:

*"He did not earn our trust (...) (Leader) seems to make incomprehensible and unreasonable decisions".*

*"We do not give him credibility due to his past, and we know we cannot count on him".*

**Transgression induction** – Studies 1-3

Recently, (leader) seems to have taken some 'unconventional measures' during his mandate. In particular, there were reports stating that he has been ignoring some safety measures in (country)'s hospitals as he considered them as 'minor problems'. Also, he has provided a report to the Government to support their proposed changes to the pay and support of hospital work. The report states that to ensure the provision of health services for longer hours, in a cost saving way, changes need to be made to all hospital worker contracts, increase the number of work hours, yet reducing the provision of their overtime pay.

**Social Control manipulation** – Study 2

Even though the validity of the senator's actions is still up for debate, (leader) has been under investigation by the Attorney-General due to the 'administrative decisions' recently adopted by the (leader), speculated as a misuse of public funds.

**Present condition**

After an initial investigation, the Attorney-General stated:

*"This case is already brought to trial, and the (leader) will be prosecuted and judged according to the law".*

**Absent condition**

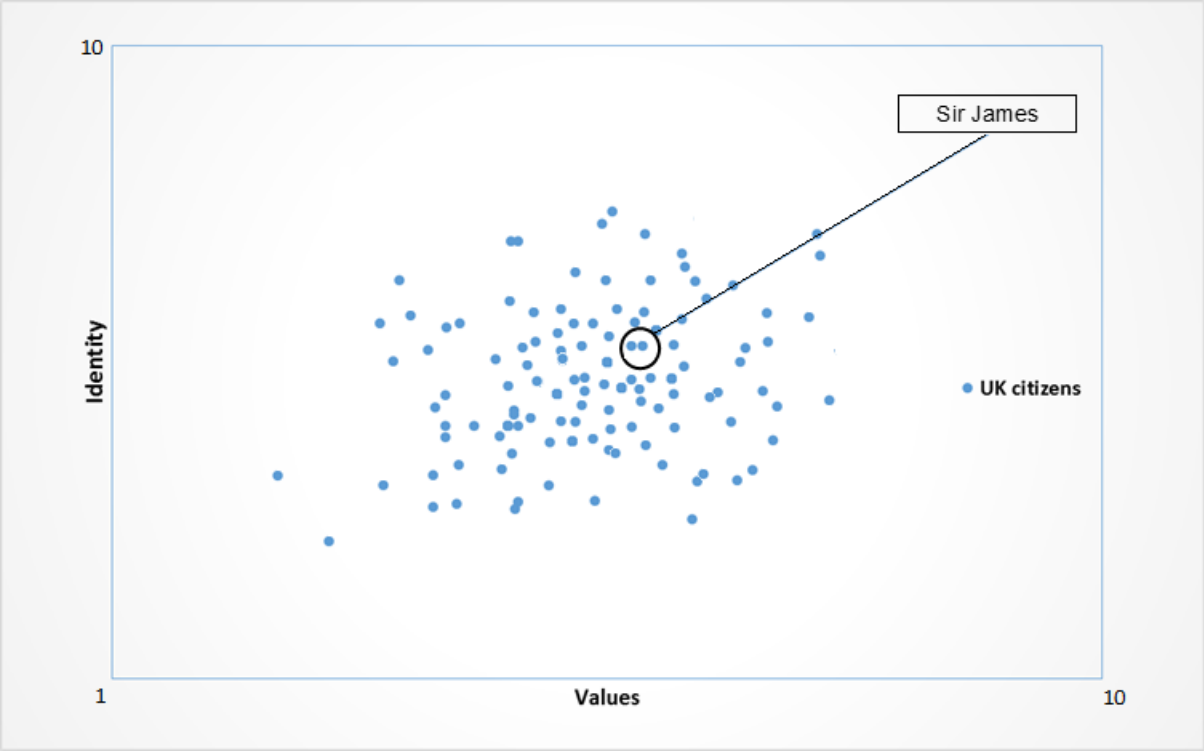
After an initial investigation, the Attorney General stated that:

*"The (leader) will not be prosecuted and brought to court, and the case will be dismissed".*

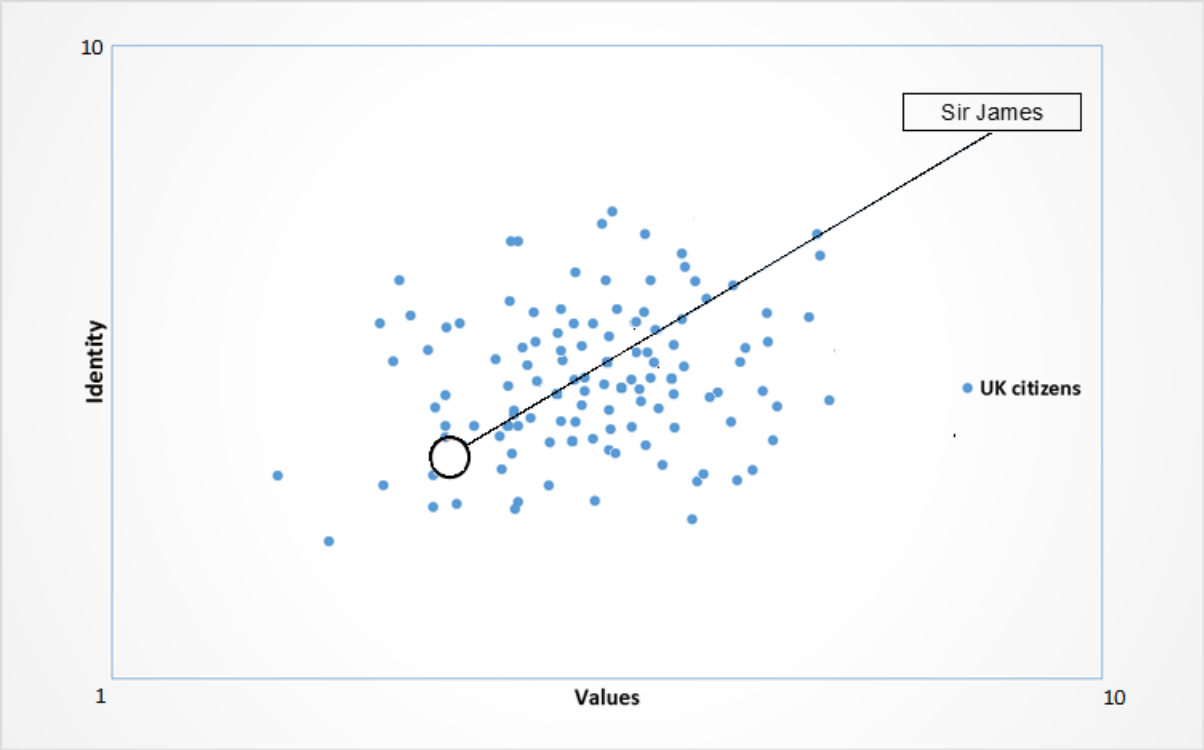
**Leader Prototypicality manipulation** – Study 3

A recent poll gathered from a sample of (country) citizens collected their opinion on general values and identity factors. The same survey was also applied to (leader). These are the comparative results between (country) citizens and (leader):

**Prototypical condition**

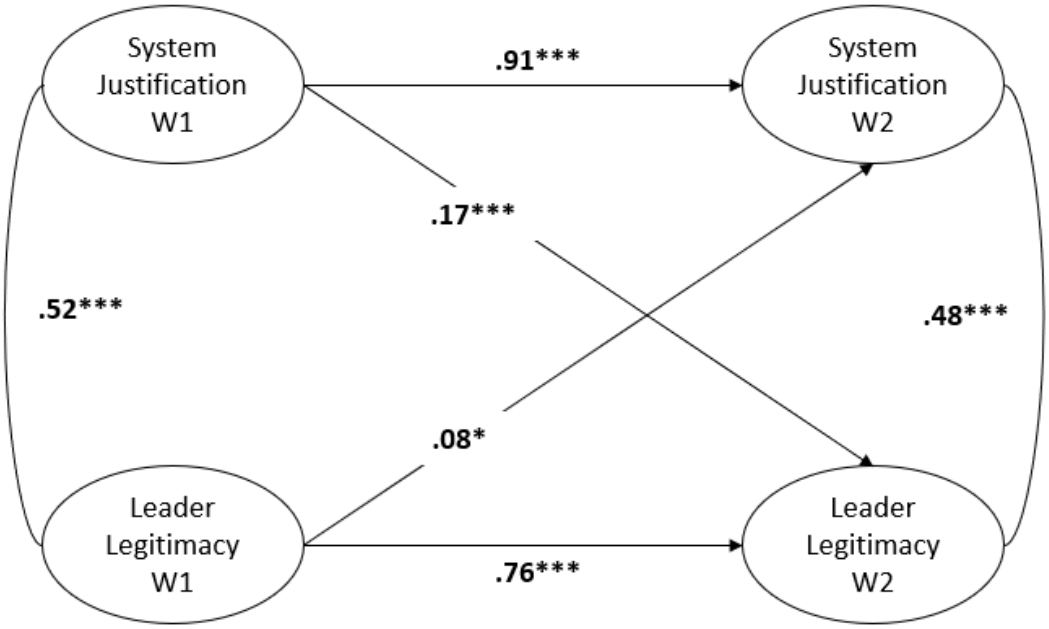


**Non-Prototypical condition**



**Appendix C –** Analysis

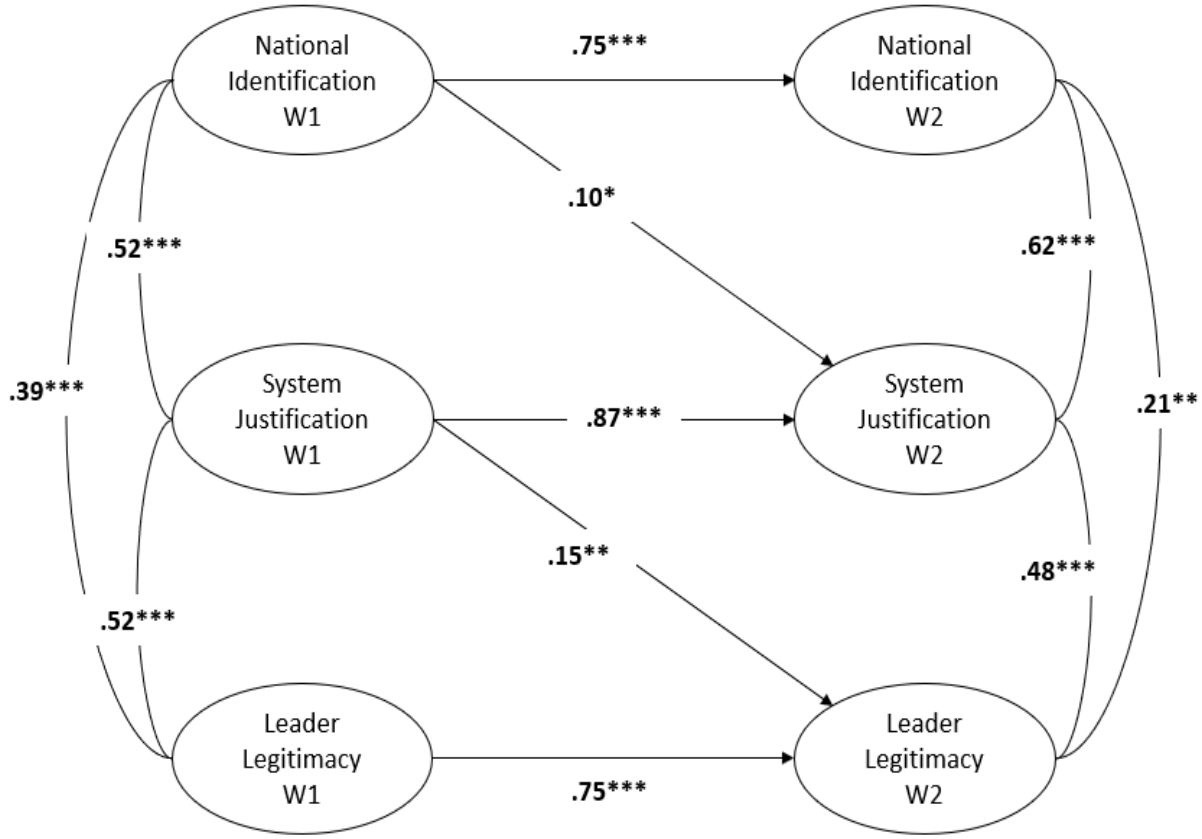
C1. Cross-lagged model (standardized estimates) between system justification and leader legitimacy across 2 waves (Study 6).




All possible paths included in the model tests but only significant paths are presented.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

C2. Cross-lagged model (standardized estimates) between national identification, system justification and leader legitimacy across 2 waves (Study 9).




All possible paths included in the model tests but only significant paths are presented.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001