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Support for Anonymous as Vicarious Dissent: Testing the Social Banditry Framework

Giovanni A. Travaglino

Center for the Study of Group Processes, School of Psychology, University of Kent

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Anonymous, social banditry, dual pathway model, political action, intracultural appropriation theory, vicarious dissent

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Correspondence regarding this article may be directed to Giovanni A. Travaglino at the Centre for the Study of Group Processes, School of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NP, UK. Email G.A.Travaglino@kent.ac.uk

Support for Anonymous as Vicarious Dissent: Testing the Social Banditry Framework

Abstract

This research uses the social banditry framework to propose that voiceless individuals in an unjust context may express their grievances vicariously. Specifically, it holds that individuals who perceive the system as unjust but lack political efficacy, express their anger against the system as support for actors whose behavior disrupts the system's functioning. These actors are situated outside conventional societal and political structures of power, and institutions. To test the social banditry framework, two studies investigate attitudes toward Anonymous, a group of hackers who challenge the status quo using online tactics such as trolling. Study 1 ($N = 304$) demonstrates that appraising the system as more unjust, and perceiving lower political efficacy are positively linked to anger against the system, which in turn predicts more positive attitudes toward Anonymous. In contrast, stronger injustice-fueled anger and stronger political efficacy predict intentions to engage in direct forms of political action, such as protesting or voting. Study 2 ($N = 410$) replicates these findings, and theorizes and tests the role of individualistic and collectivistic values in predicting vicarious and direct expressions of dissent. Study 2 demonstrates that endorsement of horizontal individualism predicts positive attitudes towards Anonymous, whereas horizontal collectivism predicts engagement in direct political action. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords:

Anonymous, social banditry, dual pathway model, political action, intracultural appropriation theory, vicarious dissent

In contemporary societies, *direct* engagement in political action is crucial to disadvantaged people's pursuit of social change. Taking part in mass movements such as the Arab Spring or Occupy Wall Street, signing an Amnesty International's petition, or casting a vote in electoral events such as the recent EU referendum in Britain are examples of actions that enable individuals to voice discontent, challenge the status quo, and improve their collective social and economic standing. Research in social psychology has shown that injustice appraisals and anger (Jost et al., 2012), and a sense of efficacy (Balch, 1974) are key factors in motivating individuals' engagement in these direct forms of political participation (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004).

However, disadvantaged individuals may lack material and cultural resources to join political movements or engage collectively against relevant institutions. They may have low confidence in their own abilities to influence the political decision-making process or doubt the system's willingness to respond to their needs (Balch, 1974). As a result, they may avoid engaging *directly* in political action.

Thus, the question remains if there are other channels through which disempowered individuals may express collective dissent from the status quo. In this research, I use the *social banditry* framework (Hobsbawm, 1959) and propose that support for actors who disrupt the functioning of the system (legally or illegally), and who operate outside conventional societal and political structures of power and resistance, is one such channel. Specifically, I argue that support for such actors enables disadvantaged individuals to voice their discontent against an unjust system in a *vicarious* form.

A contemporary version of social banditry is the group of hackers calling itself *Anonymous* (Wong & Brown, 2013). *Anonymous* challenge the state's authority using

trolling and other forms of misbehavior. Recently, the group was named *Person of the Year* in the Time Magazine, attempted to expose ISIS (Griffin, 2015), and intervened in the American presidential campaign (Gibbs, 2016). Despite their political and social relevance, little is known about what motivates people to support this group. The present research tests the social banditry framework to explain support for *Anonymous* as a form of vicarious dissent.

Direct Participation in Political Action

Political participation may encompass institutional (e.g., voting), non-institutional (e.g., protests, signing a petition), or even violent (e.g., damage to property) actions (van Deth, 2014; Becker & Tausch, 2015). What these (otherwise different) behaviors have in common is that they refer to a situation in which individuals *directly* engage in political action to influence and alter their political contexts.

According to van Zomeren et al.'s (2004) dual pathway model, two complementary but independent factors contribute to explaining individuals' decisions to engage directly in political action. The first factor is *injustice appraisal*. Research has demonstrated that individuals' subjective experience of disadvantage is a powerful predictor of actions aimed at confronting the disadvantage (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). At the societal level, perceiving the system as unfair increases the likelihood that individuals take part in protest (Jost et al., 2012; Rothmund, Becker, & Jost, 2016). Importantly, the perception of injustice elicits *anger*, which mediates the linkage between injustice appraisal and engagement in protest (Jost et al., 2012).

The second factor is *efficacy*. In order to take action, individuals must feel able to achieve the desired change. At the societal level, individuals must perceive they

can shape the political system, and that the political system is responsive to their needs and demands, a concept known as *political efficacy* (Balch, 1974; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). Research has demonstrated that stronger levels of political efficacy are associated with increased participation in different forms of political action, such as voting, or attending a rally (Flavin & Keane, 2012; Smets & van Ham, 2013).

Current models of political action assume inaction and passivity when individuals are unable to cope successfully with an unjust disadvantage (van Zomeren et al., 2012). There is also some evidence that individuals are more likely to opt for violent forms of participation when they believe that their *group* cannot obtain change through collective efforts (i.e., they lack group efficacy; Taush et al., 2011). But how do individuals express collective dissent when they perceive an unjust *system* as irresponsible to their political needs (i.e., they lack political efficacy)?

Here, I contend that in such circumstances individuals' may opt to convey their dissent *vicariously*. Rather than engaging directly in political action, they may support actors who are otherwise outside the conventional realm of politics, are often targeted as criminals by the state, and whose behavior disrupt the system's functioning. To test this contention, in the present research I investigate support for the hacker group *Anonymous*. Specifically, I contend that support for this group represents an expression of inchoate anger and dissent when individuals do not feel they can express their political grievances by directly targeting institutions, the system, or the government.

Social Banditry as Vicarious Dissent

If social and economic arrangements prevent subordinate groups from expressing dissent against oppression and injustice, individuals must rely on

alternative strategies for criticizing and resisting power (Scott, 1990). For instance, in traditional peasant societies, the masses were devoid of political voice and had few means for pursuing or expressing a desire for social change (Hobsbawm, 1973). In such a context, individuals' aspirations for social justice took the form of inchoate anger, a desire for vengeance against the oppressive establishment (Schneider & Schneider, 2008). Groups like bandits, rustlers, and brigands often became the embodiment of such anger.

Hobsbawm (1959) used the label 'social banditry' to describe those outlaws who, in peasant societies, were labelled as criminals by the authorities, but were supported and protected by local communities. Social bandits were sometimes regarded as heroes because their robberies and looting were construed as acts of defiance against the rich and powerful. They disputed the social order by showing that the powerful and the oppressors could be challenged.

Traditionally, social bandits prospered in geographic areas that were hard to police such as mountains, forests, and deserts. Epitomized by figures such as Robin Hood or Jesse James, they were celebrated in local folklore as noble individuals who robbed the rich, gave to the poor and used violence only for self-defense and for righting wrongs. Their deeds enabled disadvantaged individuals, who felt they had no access to other means, to take part in a sort of vicarious 'protest' against the oppressors.

Sociological and historical research has long debated whether certain outlaws in specific contexts were in fact 'vicarious executor(s) of the unarticulated rage of most of the rural poor' (Lewin, 1979, p. 82), or merely self-interested criminals who preyed on and exploited peasants as well as landlords (Blok, 1972; Hobsbawm, 1972; Joseph, 1990; Slatta, 2004; Schneider & Schneider, 2008). Nonetheless, regardless of

its phenomenology, social banditry has an important psychological function. Support for banditry may reflect disadvantaged individuals' desire for more justice, a vicarious expression of dissent. Such a psychological dimension has yet to be empirically investigated. In this research, I test the social banditry framework and investigate support for Anonymous vis-à-vis intentions to participate in direct forms of institutional (voting) and non-institutional (protest) political action.

Anonymous as Social Banditry

Anonymous is a network of hackers that emerged from the online board '4chan' in 2006 (Coleman, 2014; Jarvis, 2014; Wong & Brown, 2013). Originally, *Anonymous* was known for its outrageous pranks aimed at upsetting people and creating public amusement. This behavior, known as *trolling*, includes spamming online forums, disrupting access to web pages (DDoS), revealing people's personal information and spreading disturbing content on the internet.

Anonymous started to attract popular interest when it used these tactics to oppose Scientology's attempts to limit freedom of expression on the internet (Coleman, 2014). Since then, *Anonymous* has become an important global actor, waging 'war' against the US government, ISIS and other actors, and engaging in a series of 'operations' against financial companies. While the political meaning of such actions is more explicit compared to earlier hoaxes, trolling has remained an important component of *Anonymous*' behavior.

Anonymous shares important characteristics with the traditional concept of social banditry (Söderberg, 2008; Wong & Brown, 2013). *Anonymous* uses both legal and illegal tactics to attack its targets and challenge authorities, although they do not have a coherent and unified political program. As traditional bandits, they operate in a space which is difficult to police and oversee, the internet (Schneider & Schneider,

2008). Importantly, *Anonymous* is surrounded by the same ambiguity that characterized the concept of social banditry. They may be perceived as Robin Hood-type figures, who ‘take from the powerful to empower the disempowered’ (Wong & Brown, 2013, p. 1016) or merely as trouble makers, or even criminals (Tomblin & Jenion, 2016). Their operations are conducted for personal enjoyment and amusement, as well as ‘punishing’ institutions and corporations.

Social Banditry, Individualism and Anonymous

Social bandits were not revolutionaries and did not explicitly promote ideas about justice, or collective change. Instead, their actions sanctioned individuals’ desire for vengeance against the oppressors, their ambitions to ‘take the law into their own hands’ and the righting of individual wrongs (Hobsbawm, 2000). Here, I propose that, compared to direct engagement in political action, vicarious dissent and support for social banditry reflect an affirmation of individualistic values.

Individualism and collectivism are distinctive cultural values which place relatively stronger importance either on the individual or the harmony of the group, respectively (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995). Individualism emphasizes personal autonomy, independence and self-interest. In contrast, collectivism emphasizes interdependence, groups’ common fate, and harmonious relationships.

Individualism and collectivism can be further divided along the *vertical* and *horizontal* dimensions, depending on the importance of values of *hierarchy* or *equality*, respectively (Sivadas, Bruvold, & Nelson, 2008). The vertical dimension captures individuals’ acceptance of hierarchical relationships and differences in status among individuals, whereas the horizontal dimension refers to the acceptance of egalitarianism. The resulting four-fold typology encompasses horizontal

individualism (HI) and collectivism (HC), vertical individualism (VI) and collectivism (VC).

Previous research has demonstrated such values may influence political decisions. For instance, using data from the 1990-1992 National Election Studies, Funk (1998) showed that stronger individualism (and lower collectivism) was associated with lower propensity to engage in collective actions aimed at benefitting the community. This is because people endorsing individualistic values may be less attuned to the societal interest, and more attuned to self-interest (cf. van Prooijen, 2013).

Research has yet to investigate the role of individualistic and collectivistic values in the context of social banditry and *Anonymous*. According to the Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT), social actors challenging the established order seek legitimacy through cultural beliefs and values shared among the population to gain support, justify their actions, and achieve their goals (Travaglino, Abrams, & Russo, 2017). For instance, in the Southern Italian context, Travaglino, Abrams and Randsley de Moura (2014) showed that endorsement of masculine honor beliefs among youth was associated with a more positive view of mafia-style groups. This is due to mafia's appropriation and strategic use of values of masculinity, self-reliance and violence.

But which values are used by *Anonymous* to obtain legitimacy? The actions of *Anonymous* are characterized by a strong tension between individualistic and collectivistic values (Coleman, 2014; Goode, 2015). *Prima facie*, *Anonymous* seems to emphasize collectivism. For instance, *Anonymous*' membership is subsumed under the umbrella of an overarching collective identity. Members all use the same sobriquet ('anonymous') when they communicate with each other, and they all wear

the same Guy Fawkes mask when they interact with the public. Such measures protect members' identity in case of illegal actions. They also work as a check against potential temptations for self-aggrandizement and fame. Whereas *Anonymous* (as a collective identity) is well known and influential, its anonymous members are generally not.

However, *Anonymous*' ethos places an even stronger emphasis on individualistic values. It promotes personal privacy, individual autonomy, and unrestricted freedom of speech. Consistent with the broader hacker community' ethos, *Anonymous* distrusts centralized authority and celebrates the 'tremendous power of the individual' (Coleman & Golub, 2008, p. 256). Columbia (2013) characterizes *Anonymous* as (cyber)libertarians, a strongly individualistic form of political ideology (Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012). Importantly, in line with the notion of social banditry, *Anonymous*' operations resemble more closely acts of revenge against governments and corporations, rather than a program aimed at improving the collective interest. This research examines the role of individualistic and collectivistic values in predicting support for *Anonymous* vis-à-vis direct political engagement.

Overview of the Studies and Hypotheses

In this research, I present two studies investigating attitudes toward *Anonymous* vis-à-vis engagement in direct forms of political action. According to the social banditry framework, people in an unfair context, but with no political voice, will feel anger against the system. This should in turn boost support for actors who disrupt and challenge the system, and thus who provide a *vicarious* voice for such anger (Hobsbawm, 2000). This framework implies that stronger injustice appraisals and lower levels of political efficacy should predict stronger anger against the system. Anger should, in turn, predict more positive attitudes toward *Anonymous*.

These studies compare attitudes toward *Anonymous* to intentions to engage in non-institutional (protest) and institutional (voting) forms of *direct* political action. According to the dual pathways model, injustice-fueled anger and efficacy are two distinct paths that explain participation in political action. Therefore, individuals should be more likely to express intentions to protest when they report higher levels of anger and stronger political efficacy. Finally, stronger political efficacy (but not anger) should be a predictor of voting intentions because of the institutional, and system-supporting character of voting (Tausch et al., 2011).

In addition, Study 2 tests the relationship between individualistic and collectivistic values and support for *Anonymous* vis-à-vis other forms of direct political engagement. Support for social banditry is a manifestation of individuals' desire for personal vengeance against the system, rather than a program for collective social change. Moreover, *Anonymous* promotes values of personal autonomy and individualism. Thus, in line with the social banditry framework and ICAT, I predict that endorsement of individualistic values will be linked to more positive attitudes toward *Anonymous*. In contrast, participation in direct political action is – by definition – a form of collective action aimed at promoting societal interest. Thus, collectivistic values should predict intentions to engage in direct forms of political action such as protesting or voting (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Funk, 1998). Because both support for *Anonymous* and political action represent a desire for social change and justice, both expressions of dissent should be predicted by horizontal (rather than vertical) values.

Across studies, I included measures of participants' political orientation and subjective social status to control for their effects. Individuals' political orientation may influence how they perceive inequality (Rothmund et al., 2016). This, in turn,

may affect individuals' intentions to engage in direct forms of political action or their attitudes toward *Anonymous*. Subjective social status refers to individuals' perception of their position in the social hierarchy (Jackman & Jackman, 1973), and may affect their confidence in political institutions (Cook & Gronke, 2005). Thus, it is important to control for this construct. Finally, as previous research has shown that younger people are more likely to use the internet to engage in political action (Bakker & Vreese, 2011), and because hacking is associated with a male stereotype (Tanczer, 2016), analyses control for gender and age.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure. Three hundred and four British participants (151 males, 151 females, 1 unreported) took part in the study. The mean age was 33.39 ($SD = 11.17$) and the majority were English (85.82%). The remaining participants were from Scotland (6.8%), Wales (5.6%) and Northern Ireland (1.98%). Participants were recruited using Qualtrics via the online platform Prolific Academic (www.prolific.ac) to participate in a survey "about social issues" (see the Appendix for further information about the sample). After completing the measures, participants were debriefed in writing, thanked and compensated for their time.

Materials. Responses were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) unless differently noted in the succeeding text. For each construct, the order of presentation of the items was randomized. A mean score for each construct was computed by averaging the relevant items.

Political efficacy. Political efficacy was measured using seven items from various scales (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Muller, Jukam, & Seligson, 1982; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Watts, 1973; cf. Taush et al., 2011): 'The way people

vote is the main thing that decides how things are run in this country’, ‘It is only wishful thinking to believe that one can really influence what happens in society at large’ (reverse-coded), ‘Government officials don't care much about what people like me think’ (reverse-coded), ‘It seems that whoever people vote for, things go on pretty much the same’ (reverse coded), ‘I feel I am quite well represented in our political system’, ‘How much influence do you think someone like you can have over national government decisions?’ and ‘To what extent do you feel that the basic rights of citizens are well protected by our political system?’ (1 = *none at all*, 7 = *a great deal*). Items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .77$).

Perceived justice of the system. Perception of living in a just system was measured using three items drawn from Kay and Jost's (2003) system justification scale. The items measured the perception that the UK's economic and social arrangements are just and fair. Items used were, ‘In general, I find British society to be fair’, ‘Most of the British policies serve the greater good’, and ‘Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness in the UK’ ($\alpha = .86$).

Anger. Participants' perceived anger toward the political system was measured with three items (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Participants read ‘In general when I think about our political system, I feel...’ and then indicated the extent they felt angry, frustrated, and outraged ($\alpha = .88$).

Intentions to participate in non-institutional political action. Intentions to engage in political action were measured with three items (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*). Participants first read ‘below are listed a series of activities people may take part in to express their voice and/or dissent in society. Please indicate how likely you would be to take part in each of these activities in the future if the opportunity arises’.

Participants were then asked to indicate the likelihood to ‘sign a petition’, ‘attend a protest event’ and ‘participate in a public demonstration’ ($\alpha = .70$).

Voting intentions. Participants were asked how likely they were to vote in the next general elections (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*).

Attitudes toward Anonymous. Attitudes toward *Anonymous* were measured using nine items. Before completing the items, participants read a factual description of the group (see Appendix), and were shown *Anonymous*’ symbol, an image of the Guy Fawkes mask. Items were: ‘The aims of Anonymous are legitimate’, ‘Anonymous’ activities are dangerous for democracy’ (reverse-coded), ‘Anonymous’ activities deserve respect’, ‘Anonymous and other like-minded groups are criminals’ (reverse-coded), ‘Anonymous and other like-minded groups are a threat to personal security’ (reverse-coded) ‘Anonymous and other like-minded groups are a threat to national security’ (reverse-coded), ‘Anonymous’ activities deserve admiration’, ‘Anonymous and other like-minded groups are a threat to democracy’ (reverse-coded), and ‘The activities of Anonymous may have positive consequences for our society’. The items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .91$).

Political orientation. Participants’ political orientation was measured using one item ($1 = left$, $7 = right$). Participants read, ‘Many people think of political attitudes as being on the “left” or “right”. This is a scale stretching from the Left to the Right. When you think of your own political attitudes, where would you place yourself?’

Subjective social status (SSS). To measure SSS, participants were shown a representation of a ladder with 8 rungs, together with instructions adapted from Demakakos, Nazroo, Breeze, and Marmot (2008; see Appendix). Participants were then able to select a number between one and eight.

Results and Discussion

Intercorrelations among variables, means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Consistent with the social banditry framework, an inspection of the bivariate correlations revealed a significant relationship between attitudes toward *Anonymous* and political efficacy ($r = -.18$), the perception of the fairness of the system ($r = -.23$) and anger toward the system ($r = .30$).

Path Analysis. I tested the social banditry framework using a path model, where the perceived fairness of the system and political efficacy predicted attitudes toward *Anonymous* through anger against the political system. In line with the dual pathways model, paths were modelled from both political efficacy and anger to intentions to engage in non-institutional and institutional political action.

Residuals of voting intentions, collective action intentions, and attitudes toward *Anonymous* were allowed to covary, to capture systematic variation between the variables not accounted by the predictors (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Gender, age, political orientation and SSS were covariates in the model. Parameters were estimated using full information maximum-likelihood method, given that there were few missing observations (< 3%). Analyses were run in R using the Lavaan package emulating Mplus (Rosseel, 2012).

The model had a very good fit. Chi-square was non-significant, $\chi^2 = (4, N = 304) = 3.48, p = .48$. The other indices also indicated a well-fitting model, AGFI = .998, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.01, RMSEA < .001 (90% CI = 0.00 to 0.08, $p = .77$).

Figure 1 summarizes the model.

Perceived justice, $\beta = -.30, SE = .06, p < .001$, and political efficacy, $\beta = -.38, SE = .08, p < .001$, were negatively related to anger against the political system. This

is consistent with previous findings from Tausch et al. (2011, Study 3) and suggests that perceiving the political system as unfair and irresponsible boosts anger against it.

Anger in turn predicted attitudes toward *Anonymous*, $\beta = .22$, $SE = .05$, $p = .001$. There were no direct relationships between perceived justice and political efficacy, and attitudes toward *Anonymous* $\beta < \pm .08$, $SE < .09$, $p > .24$.

In line with the dual pathway model, intention to participate in non-institutional political action was predicted by anger, $\beta = .42$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$, and political efficacy, $\beta = .29$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$, whereas the direct effect of perceived justice was non-significant, $\beta = -.07$, $SE = .06$, $p = .30$. Finally, voting intentions were significantly predicted by political efficacy, $\beta = .16$, $SE = .11$, $p = .027$, and non-significantly by anger or perceived justice, $\beta < \pm .012$, $SE < .07$, $p > .86$, suggesting that decisions to vote are not seen as an expression of protest in the British context.

The indirect effects of political efficacy and perceived justice via anger were tested using 5,000 bootstraps. As expected, and consistent with the social bandit framework, both the indirect effects of perceived justice, $\beta = -.07$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-.09, -.02], and political efficacy, $\beta = -.08$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.17, -.04] on attitudes toward *Anonymous* were significant. In line with the dual pathway model, there was a significant indirect effect of perceived justice on participation in non-institutional political action, $\beta = -.12$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.16, -.06] (see also Jost et al., 2012). Interestingly, there was also a negative indirect effect of political efficacy on participation in non-institutional political action via anger, $\beta = -.16$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [-.29, -.12].¹

Study 2

Method

Participants and procedure. Four hundred and ten participants (188 males, 212 females, 10 unreported) from the USA were recruited using Qualtrics and Mturk. The mean age was 34.99 ($SD = 10.93$). Participants were from different States, including California (9.5%), Florida (9.2%), Texas (6.3%), Pennsylvania (5.7%), New York (5.5%) and Illinois (5.2%). The other States represented in the sample each accounted for < 5% of the sample (see the Appendix for further information about the sample). Data for this study was collected in December 2015, before the official start of the American presidential primaries.

Materials. The measures were the same as in Study 1, except that a measure of horizontal/vertical individualism/collectivism (Sivadas, et al., 2008) was included. Responses were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). For each construct, items' sequences were randomized and a mean score was computed by averaging the relevant items.

Political efficacy. Seven items as in Study 1 were used to measure participants' perceived ability to exert political power ($\alpha = .82$).

Perceived justice of the system. Three items from Kay and Jost's (2003) scale were used to measure individuals' perceived justice of the system, as in Study 1. The items were adapted to the American context and formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .87$).

Individualism/collectivism. Participants' orientation toward the individualism/collectivism and horizontal/vertical dimensions was measured using a slightly adapted version of Sivadas, et al.'s (2008) 14-item scale. The scale includes three items tapping HI (e.g., 'I am a unique individual'), three items tapping VI (e.g., 'competition is the law of nature'), four items tapping HC (e.g., 'I feel good when I cooperate with others'), and four items tapping VC (e.g., 'I would sacrifice an activity that I enjoy very much If my family did not approve of it').

Anger. Perceived anger toward the political system was measured using the same three items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .89$).

Intentions to participate in non-institutional political action. Intentions to engage in political action were measured with the same three items (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*) as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .80$).

Voting intentions. Participants were asked how likely they were to vote on the next election day (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*).

Attitudes toward Anonymous. Participants rated their perception of *Anonymous* using the same nine items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .94$). Before completing the items, participants were also shown an identical description and image.

Political orientation. One item measured participants' political orientation, 'Would you consider yourself a Liberal or a Conservative?' (1 = *extremely liberal*, 7 = *extremely conservative*)

Subjective social status (SSS). Participants' perception of their own social status was measured using the same graphic item used in Study 1.

Results and Discussion

Bivariate correlations showed a significant relationship between attitudes toward *Anonymous* and political efficacy ($r = -.16$), perceived justice ($r = -.39$), and anger ($r = .39$). Intercorrelations among variables, means, and standard deviations are shown in Table 2.

To check whether the scale used was able to distinguish the different cultural dimensions, a factor analysis was performed on the 14 items measuring HI, VI, HC, and VC, using principal components as the method of extraction and varimax rotation. A four-factor solution emerged explaining 66% of the variance. In line with Sivadas et al. (2008), items assessing each of the four constructs loaded on the

expected factor, except the item '*My happiness depends very much on the happiness of those around me*' which cross-loaded on both HC and VC (rotated factor loadings .49 and .39, respectively). In addition, the item '*Children should feel honored if their parents receive a distinguished award*', whose expected factor was VC (.23), loaded more strongly on HC (.53). Thus, these two items were dropped.

A factor analysis on the remaining 12 items using principal components as the method of extraction and varimax rotation yielded a four-factor solution explaining 73% of the variance. All the items loaded strongly on the expected factor ($> .80$) but not on the others ($< .19$). The reliability of each of the three-item subscale was satisfactory, $\alpha > .79$. Therefore, the 12-item version of the scale is used in the analyses below.

Path Analysis. In line with the social banditry framework, I tested a path model in which perceived justice and political efficacy predicted attitudes toward *Anonymous* via anger against the political system. Following the dual pathway model, distinct paths were modelled from both political efficacy and anger to intentions to engage in institutional and non-institutional political action. The horizontal/vertical individualism/collectivism subscales were added as additional predictors of political participation, voting intentions and attitudes toward anonymous. As in Study 1, residuals of political participation, attitudes toward Anonymous and voting intentions were allowed to covary. Gender, age, political orientation and SSS were covariates in the model. Because there were few missing observations ($\leq 2.19\%$), FIML was used to estimate parameters in the model. Analyses were run using R and the Lavaan package emulating Mplus.

The model had excellent fit and is summarized in Figure 2. Chi-square was non-significant, $\chi^2 = (5, N = 405) = 7.02, p = .22$. The other indices indicated a well

fitting model, AGFI = .997, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .011, RMSEA = .03 (90% CI = 0.00, 0.08, $p = .67$). Anger was predicted by political efficacy, $\beta = -.30$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$, and perceived justice of the system, $\beta = -.29$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$. In turn, anger positively predicted attitudes toward *Anonymous*, $\beta = .16$, $SE = .05$, $p = .002$. Perceived justice significantly predicted attitudes toward *Anonymous*, $\beta = -.28$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$. The path from political efficacy to attitudes toward *Anonymous* was non-significant, $\beta = .06$, $SE = .07$, $p = .31$.

Consistent with the dual pathways model, intentions to engage in non-institutional political action were predicted by anger, $\beta = .36$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$ and political efficacy, $\beta = .29$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$. The path from perceived justice was not significant, $\beta = -.04$, $SE = .06$, $p = .55$. Voting intentions was predicted by political efficacy, $\beta = .13$, $SE = .08$, $p = .017$ and, unexpectedly, anger, $\beta = .18$, $SE = .05$, $p = .001$. There was no effect of perceived justice, $\beta = .02$, $SE = .06$, $p = .73$.

As expected, HI was uniquely and positively associated with attitudes toward *Anonymous*, $\beta = .14$, $SE = .07$, $p = .005$. VI, HC, VC did not significantly predict attitudes toward *Anonymous*, $\beta_s < .07$, $p_s > .14$. This is consistent with ICAT and the hypothesis that support for *Anonymous* reflect an expression of individualistic values. In line with the idea that positive attitudes toward *Anonymous* represent individuals' aspiration toward more equality, the horizontal – but not the vertical – dimension predicted support for the group. In contrast, HC predicted intentions to participate in non-institutional political action, $\beta = .16$, $SE = .07$, $p = .001$, and voting intentions, $\beta = .21$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$. Other dimensions of collectivism and HI and VI were not significantly related to either variable, $\beta_s < .08$, $p_s > .09$, consonant with the fact that political participation and voting are activities driven by collective ideals.

Consistent with the social banditry framework, there were significant indirect effects of political efficacy, $\beta = -.07$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-0.11, -0.02], and perceived justice, $\beta = -.05$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-0.08, -0.01], on attitudes toward Anonymous. In line with the dual pathway model, there was a significant indirect effect of perceived justice on intentions to engage in non-institutional political action, $\beta = -.05$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-0.09, -0.02]. As in Study 1, there was a significant (and negative) indirect effect of political efficacy on participation in non-institutional political action via anger, $\beta = -.05$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.13, -.03].

General Discussion

This research investigated attitudes toward *Anonymous*, a group of hackers using different tactics to challenge and retaliate against governments and corporations. I drew on the social banditry framework (Hobsbawm, 1959), and proposed that support for *Anonymous* represents a vicarious expression of dissent. I hypothesized that weaker perceived political efficacy and stronger sense of injustice would be associated with more positive attitudes toward *Anonymous* through anger against the political system. Across two samples ($N = 304$ and $N = 410$) and two different geographical contexts (the UK and the US) results supported this hypothesis.

Study 1 used a path model to test predictors of attitudes toward *Anonymous* vis-à-vis intentions to engage directly in institutional (voting) and non-institutional (e.g., protesting) political action. Consistent with prior research (e.g., van Zomeren, et al., 2004), stronger injustice-fueled anger and stronger levels of political efficacy significantly predicted non-institutional political action. Political efficacy (but not anger) was a significant predictor of voting intentions, consonant with the idea that, at least in the British context, voting is a non-confrontational form of political engagement.

In line with my theorising and the social banditry framework, people who perceived weaker political efficacy and expressed lower justice appraisals expressed stronger support for *Anonymous* through anger against the political system. This pattern of results is consistent with the idea that social actors like *Anonymous* may become a vehicle for individuals' anger against an unjust system, and convey dissent vicariously.

Study 2 largely replicated these results in a different geographical context, the US. Notably, in Study 2 anger was a significant predictor of individuals' voting intention. This is perhaps an indication of current party polarization, and the resulting confrontational nature of voting, in the American context (Kimball & Gross, 2007).

In addition, Study 2 extended Study 1 by examining the role of individualism and collectivism in the context of vicarious and direct political engagement. Based on the notion of social banditry, and on evidence that *Anonymous* emphasizes values of individualism and libertarianism (Golumbia, 2013), I proposed that endorsing an individualistic orientation would be associated with more positive attitudes toward *Anonymous*. More specifically, because support for *Anonymous* conveys individuals' aspirations for social equality, I proposed that the horizontal dimension of individualism should be associated with support for the group.

Results supported these hypotheses. Individuals who more strongly endorsed HI expressed more favorable attitudes toward *Anonymous*. This effect was independent of other constructs and cultural dimensions. This indicates HI's distinct role in explaining attitudes toward *Anonymous*. In contrast, those who more strongly endorsed HC had stronger intentions to engage in political action. These findings are consonant with the social banditry framework, and in particular Hobsbawm's (2000) observation that bandits are admired because their existence conveys a message of

personal vengeance against the authority, rather than a collective program for social change. Findings also provide support for ICAT's central proposition that cultural values may bestow groups with legitimacy. Groups can then use this legitimacy to gain stronger social consensus, accomplish their goals and objectives, and obtain power and support. Future research should test the role of individualism in different political contexts, and use different groups and forms of vicarious dissent.

Efficacy, Anger and Support for Social Banditry

According to the dual pathway model, injustice-fueled anger and efficacy are independent pathways to political action (van Zomeren, et al., 2012). Evidence from this research is consistent with that assumption, but only regarding direct participation in political of action. Across studies, anger fully mediated the relationship between political efficacy and attitudes toward *Anonymous*. This result can be attributed to the fact that measures used in these studies tapped participants' perception of the social and political system as a whole, rather than participants' sense of efficacy regarding specific issues or groups (Jost et al., 2012). It is reasonable to expect that participants who perceive lower levels of political efficacy, and are thus dissatisfied with the system's responsiveness to their political needs, also express more anger toward the political system. This is consistent with the idea that support for social banditry is a form of vicarious dissent, whereby political grievances that cannot be otherwise voiced trigger anger against the political system, which in turn promote support for bandits.

Another interesting feature of this evidence is the relationship between political efficacy and non-institutional political action. Political efficacy predicted intentions to engage in non-institutional political action both directly (and positively) and indirectly (but negatively). This suggests that anger may suppress the association

between political efficacy and engagement in non-institutional political action. In turn, this may explain why some authors have failed to find a relationship between political efficacy and participation in protest (e.g., Rudig & Karyotis, 2014). Future research should further investigate the articulation between political efficacy, anger and different forms of political engagement.

Moreover, this research demonstrates the key role of anger in predicting vicarious expressions of dissent. Recently, Tausch et al. (2011; Becker & Tausch, 2015) theorized that anger is a better predictor of direct engagement in, rather than of support for other agents', political actions. For instance, Tausch et al. (2011, study 2) showed that anger did not predict Muslim students' support for government policies aimed at supporting Muslim communities in India. Somewhat inconsistent with this evidence, results from these studies showed a positive relationship between anger and support for *Anonymous* (also when controlling for contempt, see footnote 1). This may be due to the fact that groups such as *Anonymous* represent a better vehicle for people's anger, compared to government policies. This finding also supports the idea that different forms of anger have different implications for political action (Tausch, et al., 2011; cf. Russel & Fehr, 1994). Support for *Anonymous* may be driven by feelings more akin to *resentment* due to the fact individuals perceive the political system as unjust and uncontrollable (Feather & Sherman, 2002; Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994). Future research should better differentiate among different forms of anger vis-à-vis support for *Anonymous*.

Limitations and Future Directions

This paper has presented two studies investigating support for *Anonymous* in the British and American contexts. Results support the social banditry framework and

the dual pathway model and provide important new insights about the idea of vicarious dissent. Nonetheless, this research is affected by some limitations.

First, the measure of political efficacy used in this study (Taush et al., 2011) does not allow to distinguish between internal and external political efficacy. Political efficacy is a complex concept with multiple dimensions (Morrell, 2003). Future studies should include measures able to distinguish between internal and external, as well as collective, dimensions of political efficacy (Lee, 2005), and investigate the specific role of each dimension in predicting vicarious dissent vis-à-vis direct engagement in different forms of political action.

In similar a vein, future research should better elucidate the role of grievances and injustice appraisals in predicting support for *Anonymous*. This research used items drawn from Kay and Jost's (2003) system justification scale, measuring the perception of the fairness of the system. Future research should test the effect of feelings of relative disadvantage and deprivation concerning more specific economic and social areas (e.g., issues of privacy and information).

A key area for future research is the transition from vicarious to direct political expressions of political dissent. There are circumstances in which *Anonymous*' supporters have taken the streets (against Scientology) or joined forces with other, more traditional, social movements and protest groups (the Occupy movement). It could be that support for groups such as *Anonymous* ultimately provides an arena where new politicized social identities may emerge, which may, in turn, promote individuals' engagement in protest. Moreover, some anti-establishment politicians such as Nigel Farage in the UK and Donald Trump in the US, or parties such as the Five Star Movement in Italy may harness vicarious dissent to gain consensus. Indeed, such actors often use the rhetoric of 'rebalancing power from large corporations and

big government institutions and putting it back into the hands of the people' (UKIP Manifesto). These are important avenues for future research.

Finally, it is important to highlight that, although cross-sectional data allow testing of theoretically specified relationships among variables, causal conclusions cannot be drawn from the data. Future research should use longitudinal and experimental designs to investigate support for *Anonymous* or other forms of modern social banditry. For example, future research could manipulate perceived political efficacy and investigate its effect on anger and support for *Anonymous*.

Implications and Conclusions

This research is the first to investigate vicarious dissent and support for *Anonymous*. Social psychological work has predominantly focused on engagement in direct forms of political action (Becker & Taush, 2015). However, disadvantaged and voiceless individuals can use different means for contesting their disadvantage (Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Scott, 1990). Support for social bandits and groups like *Anonymous* might be one such means. These groups may provide individuals with the opportunity to express dissent in a vicarious form.

This research introduces the novel social banditry framework (Hobsbawm, 2000) to the social psychological study of political action. Theories of political action such as System Justification (Jost et al., 2012) or Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1980) suggest that individuals may accept and justify existing (sometimes oppressive) social arrangements. Social Identity Theory contends that when individuals perceive intergroup boundaries as stable and legitimate they may avoid direct challenges to the status quo (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). There is indeed plenty of evidence that in some circumstances individuals do justify the system (Jost et al., 2010). Moreover, research indicates that perceiving the world as a just place, or believing that intergroup

boundaries as unchangeable, dampen engagement in political action (Ellemers, 1993; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). However, it does not follow that when individuals are not directly engaged in political action, they are supinely accepting their disadvantage. Even the most severe conditions of powerlessness can be accompanied by silent expressions of resistance. To build a better understanding of power relations in society, social psychology must make it a priority to investigate those expressions.

1 Study 1 also included a measure of contempt (1 item, ‘When I think about our political system, I feel contempt’, Tausch, et al., 2011). Consistent with the idea that support for Anonymous is an expression of anger against the system, rather than contempt, contempt did not significantly predict attitudes toward Anonymous, $\beta = .08$, $SE = .05$, $p < .22$. Moreover, contempt did not predict intentions to take part in non-institutional political action, $\beta = .06$, $SE = .05$, $p < .41$. However, in line with previous work (Tausch, et al., 2011), it was negatively and significantly associated to voting, $\beta = -.26$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$. The remaining paths were virtually unaffected by adding a measure of contempt.

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Table 1. Inter-correlations, means and standard deviations for measures used in Study 1.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Justice appraisals (1)</i>	-									
<i>Political Efficacy (2)</i>	.53***	-								
<i>Anger (3)</i>	-.50***	-.53***	-							
<i>Attitudes toward Anonymous (4)</i>	-.23***	-.19***	.30***	-						
<i>Non-institutional Political Action (5)</i>	-.19***	-.011	.34***	.29***	-					
<i>Voting (6)</i>	.02	.12*	-.04	.03	.36***	-				
<i>Political Orientation (7)</i>	.33***	.24***	-.26***	-.25***	-.27***	-.12*	-			
<i>Subjective Social Status (8)</i>	-.21***	-.16**	.16**	.09	-.02	-.06	-.09	-		
<i>Age (9)</i>	.01	-.03	-.01	-.21***	-.06	.07	.03	.12*	-	
<i>Gender (10)</i>	-.03	-.01	.03	-.25***	-.02	.12*	.03	.27***	.06	-
<i>M</i>	3.74	3.29	4.35	4.08	4.11	6.07	3.33	4.81	33.39	-
<i>SD</i>	1.47	0.98	1.5	1.26	1.28	1.5	1.41	1.22	11.17	-

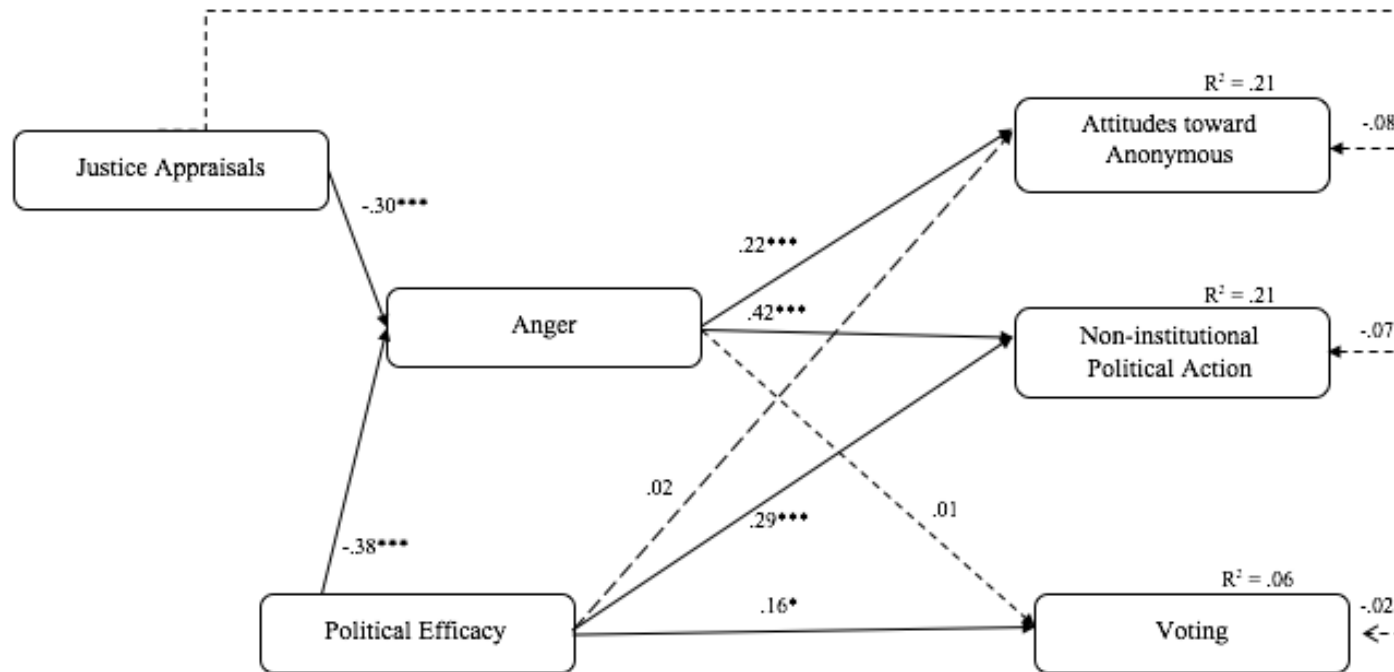
Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female

Table 2. Inter-correlations, means and standard deviations for measures used in Study 2.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>Justice Appraisals (1)</i>	-													
<i>Political efficacy (2)</i>	.40***	-												
<i>Anger (3)</i>	-.39***	-.42***	-											
<i>Attitudes toward Anonymous (4)</i>	-.39***	-.16***	.26***	-										
<i>Non-institutional Political Action (5)</i>	-.08	.18***	.25***	.16***	-									
<i>Voting (6)</i>	.05	.15**	.08	.02	.39***	-								
<i>Horizontal Individualism (7)</i>	-.15**	-.09	.08	.19***	.07	.04	-							
<i>Horizontal Collectivism (8)</i>	.07	.23***	-.06	-.08	.24***	.26***	.22***	-						
<i>Vertical Individualism (9)</i>	.32***	.01	-.04	-.06	.02	.05	.19***	.04	-					
<i>Vertical Collectivism (10)</i>	.33***	.16**	-.07	-.17***	.03	.02	-.11*	.23***	.11*	-				
<i>Political Orientation (11)</i>	.44***	-.06	-.04	-.26***	-.19***	-.07	-.14**	-.10*	.24***	.13*	-			
<i>Subjective Social Status (12)</i>	-.15**	-.18***	.09	.04	-.03	-.11*	.01	-.07	-.03	-.06	.01	-		
<i>Age (13)</i>	.10*	.10	-.10*	-.14**	.06	.18***	.00	.18***	-.11*	.03	.11*	.01	-	
<i>Gender (14)</i>	-.10*	.08	.09	-.06	.17***	.13*	.02	.18***	-.21***	-.01	-.06	.02	.12*	-
<i>M</i>	3.99	3.41	4.32	4.18	3.89	5.97	5.48	5.08	4.44	3.83	3.36	4.95	34.99	-
<i>SD</i>	1.48	1.07	1.55	1.45	1.47	1.55	0.96	1.08	1.34	1.31	1.64	1.34	10.93	-

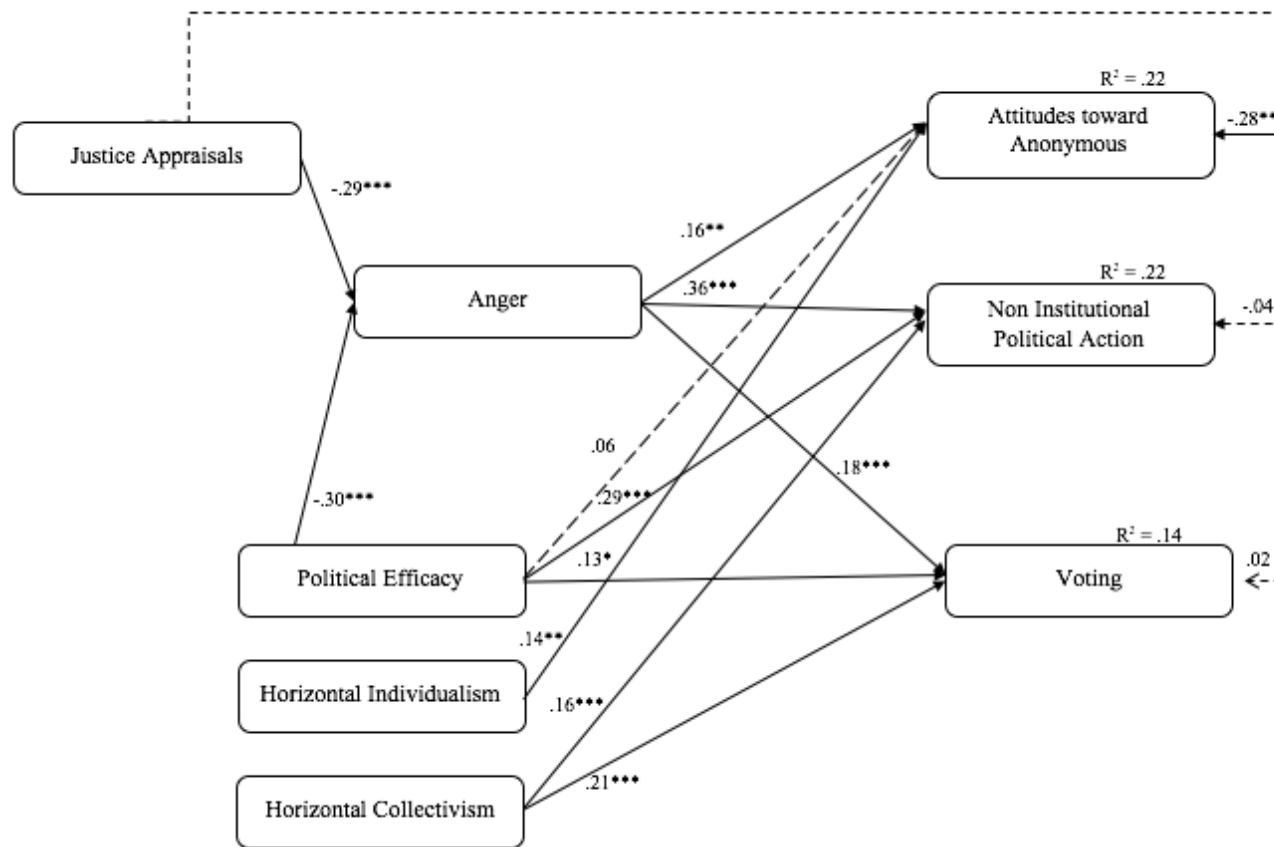
Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female

Figure 1. Path model showing coefficients for the predictors of attitudes toward Anonymous, intentions to participate in non-institutional political action and voting in Study 1.



Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Dashed lines are non-significant paths. Gender, age, political orientation and subjective social status are covariates in the model.

Figure 2. Path model showing coefficients for the predictors of attitudes toward Anonymous, intentions to participate in non-institutional political action and voting in Study 2.



Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Dashed lines are non-significant paths. Gender, age, political orientation, subjective social status and vertical individualism/collectivism are covariates in the model.

Supplementary File

Sample Information

Table A. Distribution of participants' political orientation in Study 1.

<i>Political Orientation</i>	<i>Frequency (N)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Left	36	11.9
-	54	17.8
-	67	22.1
-	87	28.7
-	43	14.2
-	11	3.6
Right	5	1.7

Table B. Distribution of participants' political orientation in Study 2.

<i>Political Orientation</i>	<i>Frequency (N)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Extremely Liberal	51	12.8
Liberal	103	25.8
Slightly Liberal	59	14.8
Moderate: Middle of The Road	89	22.3
Slightly Conservative	42	10.5
Conservative	48	12
Extremely Conservative	8	2

Materials

Before completing the items, participants read the following factual description of Anonymous:

‘In the section below we ask you to indicate your agreement or disagreement with some statements concerning the group calling itself Anonymous. Anonymous is a group of activist and hackers that use different tactics to express dissent. Examples of these tactics include (but are not limited to) distributed denial of access (DDoS, i.e., disrupting access to web pages by flooding them with waves of request), doxing (i.e., leaking of private information) and defacing websites. Anonymous acquired notoriety for carrying out cyber attacks on and hacking web sites of, governmental agencies (including UK, US, Israel,

Tunisia), corporations, religious groups, media, military contractors, military personnel, and police officers. The group act anonymously and in a coordinated manner toward a loosely self-agreed goal. Anonymous members can be distinguished in public and online by the wearing of stylized Guy Fawkes Masks'.

The measure of Subjective Social Status was preceded by the following instructions (see Demakakos, Nazroo, Breeze, & Marmot, 2008):

Think of the ladder above as representing where people stand in society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are best off –those who have the most money, most education and the best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are worst off – who have the least money, least education and the worst jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to people at the very top and the lower you are, the closer you are to the bottom. Where would you put yourself on the ladder? Please select the number below which corresponds to the rung where you think you stand.