

Validation of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale within the Spanish Population

Validación de la Escala Global de Creencia en un mundo justo en población española

Artículo de investigación

Recibido: 04/10/2023 – Aprobado: 27/11/2023 - Publicado: 03/12/2023

ISSN - 2619-6336

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30554/tempuspsi.7.1.5008.2024>

Volumen 7-1 2024

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Abstract

The concept of justice, though inherently universal, is subject to substantial influence from social factors, affecting its perception. This study is dedicated to the adaptation and validation of an assessment tool for Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS) in the Spanish context. Our investigation delves into the relationship between Belief in a Just World and key constructs such as Social Dominance, System Justification, and Right-Wing Authoritarianism, while also addressing the dimension of potential gender disparities. Our findings demonstrate robust reliability coefficients, attesting to the scale's aptitude for assessing GBJW and exhibit highly favourable adjustment indices. Notably, our score analysis reveals elevated levels of BJW among men. This comprehensive research endeavour offers an invaluable global metric, facilitating transnational studies for understanding of justice perceptions on a global scale.

Keywords: Belief in a Just World, validation, social dominance, system justification, fatalism, right-wing authoritarianism.

Resumen

El concepto de justicia, aunque inherentemente universal, está sujeto a una influencia sustancial de factores sociales que afectan su percepción. Este estudio está dedicado a la adaptación y validación de una herramienta de evaluación de la Escala de Creencia Global en un Mundo Justo (GBJWS) en el contexto español. Nuestra investigación profundiza en la relación entre la creencia en un mundo justo y constructos clave como la dominancia social, la justificación del sistema y el autoritarismo de derecha, al tiempo que aborda la dimensión de las posibles disparidades de género. Nuestros hallazgos demuestran coeficientes de confiabilidad robustos, lo que atestigua la aptitud de la escala para evaluar GBJW y exhiben índices de ajuste altamente favorables. En particular, nuestro análisis de puntuación revela niveles elevados de BJW entre los hombres. Este esfuerzo de investigación integral proporciona una métrica global de gran valor, que facilita estudios transnacionales para comprender las percepciones de justicia a escala global.

Palabras clave: Creencia Mundo Justo, validación, dominancia social, justificación del sistema, fatalismo, autoritarismo del ala de derechas

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Para citar este artículo

Ríos, M. L., Moreno Jiménez, P. & Hernández Ruíz, B. (2024). Validation of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale within the Spanish Population. *Tempus Psicológico*, 7(1), 188-214

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Background

Empirical evidence underscores the pivotal role of justice as a driving force behind human behaviour. However, the perception of justice is far from universal and is often shaped by specific social conditions (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). It is within this intricate landscape that the concept of Belief in a Just World (BJW), first introduced by Lerner (1980), takes centre stage. This concept has ignited a rich field of research, marked by the development of comprehensive assessment instruments, the analysis of individual variances, exploration of its multifaceted relationships with other variables, and a deeper understanding of its profound significance in people's lives (Hafer & Sutton, 2016).

According to Lerner's Theory of Justice Motive, individuals possess an innate need to believe in a just world. This belief acts as a psychological buffer, helping individuals navigate the emotional turmoil generated by encounters with injustice and perceptions of a hostile and threatening environment. BJW has far-reaching implications, impacting individuals' expectations in various domains of life, including academics, family, and leisure pursuits (Muayn-Yilik & Demir, 2021). It signifies the conviction that people ultimately receive what they deserve and deserve what they receive, thereby instilling expectations of control over one's circumstances. However, this belief can also lead to distortions, such as denial of the suffering of the innocent or the tendency to blame victims for their fate. Notably, research has yet to conclusively clarify the influence of gender on BJW (Nartova et al., 2018), making it an important variable for consideration.

Nonetheless, the imperative to uphold the belief in a just world has been scrutinized from alternative angles. Some studies delve into concepts like Fatalism, System Justification, Social Dominance Orientation, or Right-Wing Authoritarianism to elucidate their interplay with the sense of justice.

The studies on fatalism, initially pioneered by Martín-Baró (1989), propose that in life, one reaps what is predetermined by destiny. From this perspective, fatalism is construed as a

set of cultural and/or religious beliefs associated with passive, resigned, and uncritical attitudes (Díaz et al., 2015). A common thread linking BJW and fatalistic beliefs is the shared human need for certainty in an uncertain world, which invariably shapes their perception of social systems. In this context, the System Justification Theory (SJT) emerged through the work of Jost and Banaji (1994). While both theories are rooted in the quest for psychological equilibrium, they diverge in their analytical focus; BJW centres on the justification of individual-level injustices and the consequent distortion of judgments about victims, whereas the System Justification Theory shifts its lens towards the human inclination to rationalize and defend the *status quo* within social systems (Feygina et al., 2011; Kay et al., 2002). Despite their nuanced differences, these two theoretical models are closely intertwined and continue to inform our understanding of the human psyche (Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Jost et al., 2010; Kay & Jost, 2003).

BJW is not only entwined with perceptions of justice, but also bears a connection to ideological and attitudinal variables that revolve around authority and social hierarchy. In particular, numerous scholars have explored the intricate relationships between BJW, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) (Bizer et al., 2012; Etchezar et al., 2014; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Olmewood & Fiske, 2007; Pratto et al., 1994; Sabbagh, 2005; Schultz & Stone, 1994; Son Hing et al., 2007).

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is conceptually defined as individuals' predisposition towards hierarchical and non-egalitarian intergroup relationships, reflecting a penchant for their own group's superiority over others (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This orientation aligns with policies and ideologies that endorse social hierarchy. In contrast, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), as delineated by Altemeyer (1981), encompasses authoritarian submission (which legitimizes submission to authority), authoritarian aggression (characterized by a hostile disposition towards those challenging established systems), and conventionalism (indicating a general acceptance of social conventions). RWA diverges from SDO by placing a primary emphasis on sustaining submission and collective security. It becomes evident that Social Dominance Orientation (SDO),

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), SJ and even fatalism are intricately linked to BJW.

The quest to empirically define Belief in a Just World (BJW) and to distinguish it from other related concepts has led to the development of numerous measurement instruments. Within this context, the assessment of BJW has emerged as a fundamental issue, as highlighted in literature reviews conducted by Furnham (2003) and Hafer and Sutton (2016).

The inaugural measurement tool in this domain was the Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS) introduced by Rubin and Peplau (1973; 1975). While serving as a reference point in the early stages of BJW research, this scale has not been without its share of criticism. Lerner (1980) noted inadequacies in the items, which, according to him, diverged from the original BJW concept. Moreover, the scale combines both general and specific statements, adopting a unidimensional approach that was not consistently replicated in subsequent studies (Ambrosio & Sheehan, 1990; Caputi, 1994; Furnham, 2003; Lea & Fekken, 1993). Concerning statistical goodness of fit, initial data appeared adequate, but subsequent research failed to yield similar results (Ambrosio & Sheehan, 1990; Hellman et al., 2008; Loo, 2002). Additionally, the questionnaire incorporates reversed items that can undermine its internal consistency.

In light of these criticisms, numerous endeavours have been made to construct a valid BJW instrument. Several proposals are outlined in Table 1; however, the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS) has emerged as a widely adopted and robust alternative in many studies. Its popularity can be attributed to its brevity, user-friendliness, and strong psychometric properties.

Table 1*BJW Scales*

Multidimensional <i>Authors</i>	<i>Scale Name</i>	<i>Reliability</i>
Furnham & Procter (1989)	Multidimensional Just World	0.58 a 0.63
Maes (1998)	Belief in immanent justice Belief in ultimate justice	0.83
Mohiyeddini & Montada (1998)	Hope for a Just Justice Self-Efficacy to promote Justice in the world	0.89
Lucas et al. (2007)	Belief in a just world - Distributive just world - Procedural Just world	0.92 y 0.92 0.89 y 0.88
Unidimensional <i>Authors</i>	<i>Scale Name</i>	<i>Reliability</i>
Rubin & Peplau (1973)	<i>Belief in a Just World Scale</i> (BJWS)	0.79
(1975)	BJWS (revised)	0.80
Dalbert et al. (1987)	Glaube an eine gerechte Welt als Motiv	0.81 0.82
Lipkus (1991)	Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS)	0.79 a 0.82
Schmitt (1998)	Centrality of Justice	0.73

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS), conceptualized and developed by Lipkus (1991), serves a dual purpose: firstly, to establish and validate a comprehensive Belief in a Just World (BJW) index, and secondly, to provide insights into its potential applicability across diverse cultural contexts. The original questionnaire comprises seven items and underwent validation among

a sample of university students. Notably, the item selection process deliberately avoided specificity to particular content areas, such as family or business.

In terms of its psychometric properties, a maximum likelihood factor analysis yielded an eigenvalue of 4.83, explaining a substantial 69% of the total variance captured by the instrument (Lipkus, 1991). This outcome attests to the scale's robustness. Furthermore, with regard to internal consistency, the assessment yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.827, indicative of high reliability. The GBJWS has been subjected to rigorous examination by various research groups, further corroborating its reliability (Dalbert et al., 2001; Furnham, 2003). In a comprehensive scale review conducted by Hellman et al. (2008), the statistical results continued to demonstrate acceptability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81. These findings collectively affirm the GBJWS as a reliable and valuable instrument for assessing Belief in a Just World.

The validation of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS) extends across various countries and languages, underscoring its cross-cultural adaptability. Notably, adaptations have been carried out in Argentina (Barreiro et al., 2014) ($\alpha = 0.83$), Brazil (Gouveia et al., 2010) ($\alpha = 0.71$), France (Bègue, 2002) ($\alpha = 0.72$), Hungary (Dalbert et al., 2001) ($\alpha = 0.72$), Canada (O'Connor et al. 1996) ($\alpha = 0.88$), and Germany (Dalbert et al., 2001) ($\alpha = 0.65$).

Belief in a Just World (BJW) is regarded as a stable trait, facilitating the exploration of individual differences. However, it is essential to address variations between distinct cultural groups. These validations serve as invaluable resources for establishing cross-cultural comparisons. Researchers have harnessed these adaptations alongside other scales to analyse the predictive potential of these instruments (Gálvez et al., 2017; Ordoñez et al., 2016; Ruiz et al., 2014) to further our understanding of BJW across diverse cultural contexts.

Social phenomena such as the legal system, religion, economic structure, or internal distribution system could influence BJW (Zubieta & Barreiro, 2006). Furthermore, some studies reveal differences when comparing countries and cultures (Furnham, 1993). Given that Spain is one

of the European countries with higher inequality (Anghel et al., 2018), it is considered necessary to be able to assess BJW in this country.

This study builds upon the Argentine version of the GBJWS (Barreiro et al., 2014) and endeavours to assess the psychometric properties of the GBJWS within the Spanish general population. Our primary objective is to investigate potential variations rooted in cultural diversity, thereby enhancing the representativeness and generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, we aspire to establish convergent validity by examining its relationship with the constructs of Fatalism, System Justification (SJ), Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Ultimately, our aim is to furnish a robust assessment instrument that not only facilitates future research on Belief in a Just World in Spain, but also facilitates cross-cultural comparisons, contributing to a deeper understanding of this concept on a global scale.

Method

Participants

The study encompassed a total of 234 participants residing in Spain, specifically within the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, Málaga, with an average age of 38.48 years ($SD = 14.70$). Among the participants, 50.9% identified as male, while 49.1% identified as female. An exploration of sociodemographic variables revealed that at the time of the study, 67% of the sample reported having a partner, and 54.7% were actively employed. In terms of self-perceived social class, 3.5% characterized themselves as belonging to the low or lower-middle class, while 71.9% identified as middle-class, and the remaining 8.7% considered themselves part of the upper-class. Finally, with regard to educational attainment, 16.1% had completed primary education, 30.2% held secondary education qualifications, 49.1% had achieved higher education degrees, and 4.3% possessed other types of qualifications, such as vocational courses or higher education courses.

An ANOVA test was thoughtfully administered, revealing that none of the socioeconomic variables produced significant differences in the measurement of BJW, reinforcing the robustness of

our findings.

Instruments

A comprehensive questionnaire was meticulously constructed, encompassing initial instructions, sociodemographic data, and a battery of well-established instruments:

GBJWS (Global Belief in a Just World Scale)

The Spanish version of GBJWS, originally formulated by Lipkus (1991) and validated in Argentina (Barreiro et al., 2014), was employed. This questionnaire comprises seven items, eliciting responses on a Likert scale spanning from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). In the present study, the α (Cronbach's alpha) coefficient yielded a robust value of 0.816.

Social Fatalism Scale (SFS)

We utilized the measure proposed by Díaz et al. (2015), consisting of seventeen items capturing various dimensions, including predetermination, lack of control, pessimism, and presentism. Participants provided responses on a scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The reliability obtained with the sample in the present study was $\alpha = 0.860$.

Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDOS)

Employing the version adapted by Prado et al. (2011) from the original instrument (Pratto et al., 1994), our assessment comprised ten items encompassing two dimensions: Group Dominance and Opposition to Equality. Participants indicated their agreement levels on a scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). In the current study, an internal consistency of $\alpha =$

0.813 was obtained.

System Justification (SJ)

The scale by Kay and Jost (2003), comprising eight items, was incorporated into our questionnaire. The internal reliability coefficient for the analysed sample was $\alpha = 0.729$.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA)

An adapted version by Etchezahar (2012) was employed, with participants expressing their agreement levels on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Our study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.796.

These meticulously selected instruments, along with the robust internal consistencies observed, ensure the reliability and validity of our measurement tools in the present study.

Procedure

We adopted a meticulous stratified random sampling approach, which factored in both gender and employment status as key criteria. Data collection was carried out through in-person interviews, with participants personally completing the paper-based questionnaires while under the guidance and supervision of the researcher. Stringent measures were in place to safeguard participant anonymity and maintain the utmost confidentiality throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The structure of the Spanish version of GBJWS was scrutinized through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) employing EQS 6.1 statistical software. To assess the convergent validity

of GBJWS, IBM SPSS 25 was employed, entailing the computation of bivariate correlations employing Pearson's r and Student's t -test, stratified by gender.

The objective of the CFA was to explore the relationships between the set of indicators (items) and a factor variable, under the assumption of a one-dimensional model. The goodness of fit of this model was evaluated in accordance with the statistical parameters proposed by Byrne (2001). These included χ^2 and the $\chi^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$ ratio, along with NFI, NNFI, CFI, GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, and Cronbach's alpha statistics. We anticipate discovering statistically significant yet moderate-level correlations between BJW and the other variables under examination.

Results

As anticipated, the items within the GBJWS manifest a normal distribution, with an overall mean of $M = 2.38$ ($SD = 0.733$). Item-specific means can be found in Table 2. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.816$). This value surpasses the threshold of 0.70, signifying a satisfactory level of internal consistency. Figure 1 graphically illustrates the factor loadings for each individual item.

Table 2

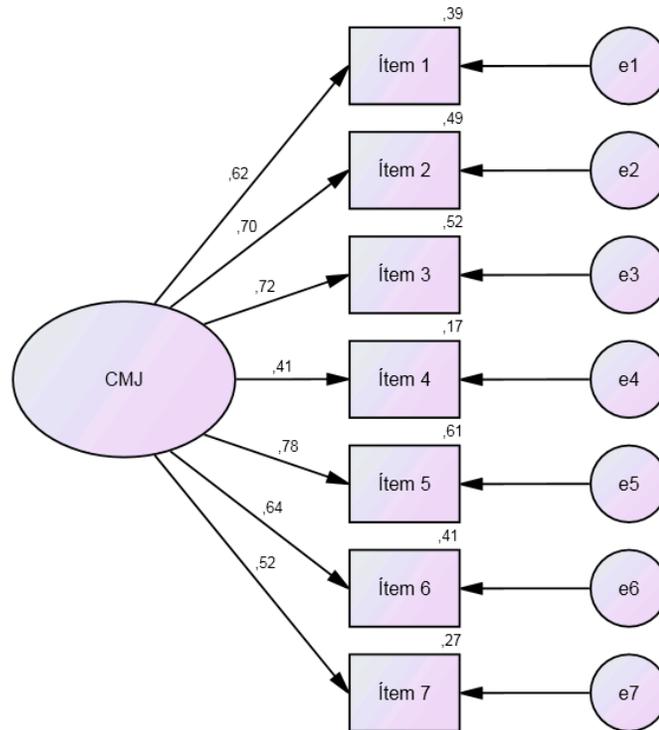
Item descriptions

Item	M (DT)
1. <i>Creo que las personas obtienen lo que tienen derecho a obtener</i> I feel that people get what they are entitled to have	2.41(1.02)
2. <i>Creo que los esfuerzos de una persona son tenidos en cuenta y recompensados.</i> I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded	2.92(1.07)
3. <i>Creo que las personas se han ganado las recompensas y los castigos que reciben.</i> I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get	2.60(1.13)

4. <i>Creo que las personas que tienen mala suerte es porque la han atraído.</i>	2.02(1.15)
I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves	
5. <i>Creo que las personas obtienen lo que se merecen.</i>	2.60(1.07)
I feel that people get what they deserve	
6. <i>Creo que las recompensas y los castigos son administrados justamente</i>	2.12(1.01)
I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given	
7. <i>Por lo general, pienso que el mundo es un lugar justo.</i>	1.96(0.96)
I basically feel that the world is fair place	
<hr/>	
	.816
Alfa de Cronbach / Cronbach's alpha	3.39
Autovalores (% de variabilidad) /	(48.48%)
Eigenvalues (% variability)	
<hr/>	

Figure 1

BJW Factor Structure



In the assessment of construct validity using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the GBWJS, we initially calculated the Chi-square statistic, yielding a value of 414.843 with 21 degrees of freedom and a probability of .007 ($p \leq 0.001$), indicating a statistically significant difference. This result suggests that the model is not a good fit. However, recognizing that Chi-square can be sensitive to sample size, we proceeded to conduct post hoc tests, as recommended by Bentler (2010), to further evaluate the goodness of fit. The results of these indices can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Goodness of fit indicators for the GBJWS

Model evaluated	
χ^2	414.843 (df=21)
NFI	0.928
NNFI	0.939
CFI	0.959
GFI	0.948
AGFI	0.897
RMSEA	0.070 (0.035-0.105)

*** $p \leq 0.001$; χ^2 =Chi-squared; NFI=Normed Fit Index; NNFI=Non-Normed Fit Index; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; GFI=Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI=Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation. In parentheses, 90% confidence intervals for RMSEA.

We can confidently affirm an acceptable model fit based on the RMSEA values falling below the threshold of 0.08. Additionally, when we consider the NFI, NNFI, CFI, GFI, and AGFI indices, where values exceeding 0.90 are indicative of a satisfactory fit, our results unequivocally support the conclusion that the one-dimensional model is indeed good.

To evaluate the convergent validity of the GBJWS, we examined its associations with variables related to Fatalism, SDO, SJ, and RWA. The correlation coefficients revealed that the connections between the GBJWS and the values recorded for these variables are statistically significant and demonstrate a moderate level of association, as can be seen in Table 4. In summary, we can confidently assert that the convergent validity of BJW with conceptually related measures has been successfully established.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that the comparison of means based on gender yielded statistically significant results [$t(231) = 2.13$, $p = 0.034$], with BJW being higher in men

Table 4

Correlations between GBJWS and other variables

	M(DT)	2	3	4	5
1. GBJWS (1-5)	2.38(.732)	.317**	.178**	.441**	.431**
2. Fatalism (1-6)	2.18(.722)		.384**	.232**	.159**
3. RWA (1-5)	2.84(.960)			.041	.052
4. SD (1-5)	1.85(.625)				.355**
5. SJ (1-9)	3.42(1.19)				

** $p < .01$

Discussion

Belief in a Just World (BJW) represents a fundamental aspect of justice motives, sparking increased research interest aimed at both conceptual and empirical elucidation. In particular, the ongoing scrutiny of BJW underscores the necessity for instrument adaptations in diverse cultural contexts to facilitate comprehensive investigations of this concept.

As advocated by Shin and Hampton (2023), individuals' awareness of undesirable life events tends to diminish their perception of fairness and justice, while an awareness of positive experiences correlates with a stronger conviction that the world operates justly. Furthermore, scholars like Mikani and Refiee (2022) have highlighted the influence of BJW on people's interpretations of violent incidents. In a similar vein, studies have explored its implications in contexts such as fostering positive identification with the host country post-migration (Leite et al., 2017) and its role in shaping explanations for intimate partner violence (Gracia, 2002; Gracia et al., 2010; Valor et al., 2011; Valor et al., 2014; Vargas et al., 2015).

In conclusion, the adaptation of measurement instruments tailored to specific cultural settings significantly enhances research endeavours in these diverse areas, allowing for a deeper understanding of the multifaceted impact of BJW.

In terms of its validation, the adaptation of the GBJWS to the Spanish context among the general population demonstrates robust psychometric qualities, fulfilling the criteria for reliability. The internal consistency coefficient underscores the instrument's strength, in line with similar validations in diverse cultural samples. Notably, our results affirm the unidimensional nature of the scale, with nearly half of the variance explained by the set of items.

Item-wise analysis reveals that item 5, "I believe that people get what they deserve," significantly contributes to explaining the underlying factor, embodying the core essence of BJW. Conversely, item 4, "I believe that people who have bad luck have brought it on themselves," contributes the least. As Schmitt (1997) asserts, a format of generic questions does not confuse BJW with domains, criteria, agents, etc., which can introduce additional sources of variance and

undermine construct validity.

The generic nature of the items empowers participants to express their personal justice perceptions without the imposition of specific aspects through the items themselves. The gender differences uncovered underscore the discriminative power of the scale, highlighting distinct levels of belief in a just world between men and women, with women registering lower scores. These findings align with prior research (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Esposito et al., 2022), warranting further investigation in future studies.

In terms of convergent validity, our results align with expectations. BJW exhibits moderate-level correlations with Fatalism, SDO, RWA, and SJ. While BJW and SDO share a positive and significant relationship, they distinctly influence processes such as stigmatization and perceptions of social justice, as observed in studies by Smith & Stathi (2022) and Etchezahar et al. (2022). Furthermore, research by Jones and Brimbal (2017) underscores the significance of BJW and RWA in contexts like jury decision-making.

Laurin et al. (2011) contend that when individuals cannot restore actual justice, they restore psychological justice, a concept aligned with the insights of Hafer and Bègue (2005) and Jost and Kay (2010). Another perspective, advocated by Augostinos (1999), posits that socially threatening events such as poverty, inequality, and racism are collectively experienced, leading to the legitimization of such phenomena. Consequently, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may be unfairly blamed, maintaining the status quo and upholding conservative ideologies (Furnham, 2003). Reactions to injustice and the perception of inequality wield a profound influence on the development of BJW.

Taking Spain's context into account, where inequality levels are alarming in comparison to the rest of Europe (Anghel et al., 2018). Lerner's (1980) assertion that observing an unjust or unequal reality motivates restoration, either through actions or distortion of personal observations, becomes particularly relevant. This, in turn, impacts the perception of other phenomena, including

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