The factorial validation of the Normative System Perception Scale: a proposal to analyze social transgression

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Abstract

In Argentina, like in the rest of Latin America, the perception of transgression and lack of institutional legitimacy are shared beliefs. This tendency to illegal practices corrodes the political, economic and social development of the country. The goals of this study are to validate the structure of the Normative System Perception Scale (EPSN, for its Spanish acronym) and to analyze the perception of the normative system functioning. The sample consisted of 508 Argentinean participants. A self-administered questionnaire with the Normative System Perception Scale and socio-demographic data was designed. Results show a good goodness-of-fit of the model and the reliability coefficients indicated satisfactory levels of internal consistency (α = .89). The descriptive analysis showed that participants had a negative perception of the normative system performance. Also the findings exhibit that women have a more negative perspective of the normative system than men, and that participants ideologically positioned on the right are more critical than those who are positioned on the left.
Key words: Legitimacy, norms, transgression.

Validación factorial de la Escala de Percepción del Sistema Normativo: una propuesta para analizar la transgresión social

Resumen

En Argentina, al igual que en el resto de América Latina, la percepción de la transgresión y la falta de legitimidad institucional son creencias compartidas. Además, la tendencia a realizar prácticas ilegales corroe el desarrollo político, económico y social de un país. Teniendo esto en cuenta, los objetivos del presente estudio fueron validar la estructura de la Escala de Percepción del Sistema Normativo (EPSN) y describir la percepción del funcionamiento del sistema normativo, con una muestra compuesta por 508 participantes argentinos. Para esto se diseñó un cuestionario autoadministrado con la escala EPSN y preguntas sobre datos sociodemográficos. Los resultados muestran una buena bondad de ajuste y coeficientes de fiabilidad que indican una consistencia interna satisfactoria (α = .89), y los análisis descriptivos dan cuenta de que los participantes presentan una percepción negativa del funcionamiento del sistema normativo y, específicamente, que las mujeres tienen una perspectiva más negativa del funcionamiento del sistema normativo que los hombres, y que los participantes posicionados ideológicamente a la derecha son más críticos que los de izquierda.
Palabras clave: Legitimidad, normas, transgresión.

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Validação fatorial da Escala de Percepção do Sistema Normativo: uma proposta para analisar a transgressão social

Resumo

Na Argentina, assim como em toda a América Latina, a percepção da transgressão e da falta de legitimidade institucional são crenças compartilhadas. Além disso, a tendência a realizar práticas ilegais corrói o desenvolvimento político, econômico e social de um país. Nesse sentido, os objetivos deste estudo foram validar a estrutura da Escala de Percepção do Sistema Normativo (EPSN) e descrever a percepção do funcionamento do sistema normativo, com uma amostra de 508 participantes argentinos. Para isso, desenhou-se um questionário autoadministrado com a escala EPSN e dados sociodemográficos. Os resultados mostram uma bondade de ajuste e coeficientes de confiabilidade que indicam uma consistência interna satisfatória (α=.89), e as análises descritivas evidenciam que os participantes têm uma percepção negativa do funcionamento do sistema normativo e, especificamente, que as mulheres têm uma perspectiva mais negativa do funcionamento do sistema normativo do que os homens; além disso, os participantes posicionados ideologicamente à direita são mais críticos que os posicionados à esquerda.

Palavras-chave: Legitimidade, normas, transgressão.

INTRODUCTION

Every society requires an institutional system with predictable rules that regulate social interaction (Schmidt & Tomasello, 2012). Institutional performance is expressed through various types of norms, which have differential statuses, coexist, and organize social interaction (Epstein, 1997).

One of the problems arising from a poor institutional performance is normative transgression. This transgression includes a wide set of behaviors that have in common the failure of collective expectations about the proper functioning of society, ranging from small infractions to open criminal acts (Rottenbacher & Schmitz, 2012).

In Argentina, transgression is such a common and settled practice that the concept of *Argentine transgression culture* is commonly used to describe all kinds of disobedience ranging from breaking civil social norms to acts of corruption (Centro de Opinión Pública de la Universidad de Belgrano, 2013; Hernández, Zovatto, & Mora y Araujo, 2005; Kurtzman & Yago, 2009; Nino, 2005; Puy, 2011; Rossignolo, 2012; Solari, 2010; Transparency International, 2015; Zommer, 2006).

Given this scenario, where transgression is perceived as a socially shared and widespread pattern, a comprehensive and systemic model was developed to explore the normative functioning at the social level (Beramendi, 2014). The Normative System Perception Scale was designed to evaluate the perception of the normative system performance (Beramendi, 2014; Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014).

The normative system is mainly conceptualized as a complex organism comprising the norms, and the institutions and actors who promote, support and control them, as well as citizens` beliefs and practices with regard to standards (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014). This proposal considers three fundamental variables to understand the functioning of the regulatory system: the perception of legitimacy, the perception of transgression, and the perception of regulatory weakness (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014).

Perception of legitimacy

Two types of justice judgments influence the perception of institutional legitimacy: distributive and procedural justice (Tyler, 2000). Distributive justice examines people's views about what is a fair outcome of distribution of resources (see Giraldo & Benítez, 2011). In free market economies, distribution norms are mostly influenced by principles that emphasize individual factors such as achievement and merit (Kelley & Zagorski, 2004). However, they are effective when people accept them and defer to decisions that give them less than they want, because they think the outcomes they have received are fair (Tyler, 2010). Distributive norms depend on redistribution policies of the State, which collects and distributes goods through centralized decision making bodies (Castillo, 2010). When people observe that the government plays a fundamental role in regulating the economy and protecting the weak and the poor, and that citizens have equal opportunities, people feel the process is just and accept the economic policies. On the other hand, if citizens believe the system is unfair because the government allows some groups to benefit, leaving others impoverished, they will be dissatisfied with those policies and will try to disregard them (Kluegel & Mason, 2004).

Procedural justice is central to developing and maintaining judgments that authorities and institution are legitimate. Since the late 1980s, researchers have recognized the central role of legitimacy to the effectiveness of the law. Legitimacy is the widespread belief that the police, the courts, and the legal system are authorities entitled to make decisions and who should be deferred to concerning matters of criminal justice (Murphy & Tyler, 2008). The perception of legitimate norms and authorities make people willing to voluntarily support the empowerment of authorities and defer to the decisions of

those authorities to follow social rules, and ultimately obey the law (Tyler, 2001). Researchers have also found that the perception of low legitimacy is associated with perception of corruption (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Seligson, 2002), the perception of low efficacy and institutional trust (Baker, 2008; Price & Romantan, 2004), and the perception of authoritarian authorities (Kluegel & Mason, 2004).

Perception of transgression

The perception of the other citizens fulfill norms is a good predictor to adherence norms. This kind of conduct influences the social normative behavior (Cialdini, 2007). The question emerges when citizens believe that the transgression is a common and shared social practice. In that sense, Cialdini, Reno and Kallegren (1990) suggest that social norms can be categorized into two types. Injunctive norms specify what ought to be done, and a promise of social sanctions is implicit if norms are not respected. Descriptive norms describe what is typical or *normal*, or in other words, what people perceive others really do.

Although one's perceptions of what most others approve of and what most others actually do in any given situation are often related, they imply different conceptions and motivations. Injunctive social norms move people into action via social evaluation, whereas descriptive social norms mobilize them to act via social information. In particular, descriptive norms bring information about what behavior is adaptive and effective (Cialdini, 2007).

The decision to comply with norms is significantly influenced by the expected evaluative reactions of others (Cialdini et al., 1990). If citizens believe that evading norms is a habit, they hold shared beliefs of normative transgression and exhibit associated generalized practices in different areas of society, resulting in naturalized social transgression (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014). Considering the contribution of Cialdini et al. (1990), transgression can be conceptualized as a descriptive norm, because it becomes an adaptive and effective behavior (Author, 2014).

Also, in relation to the influence of social behavior, the perception of control and sanction are two important predictors to reduce noncompliance, whether such control and sanction come from judicial authorities or social control (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005, 2010; Luna, Zambrano, & Hidalgo, 2013; Nelissen & Mulder, 2013). The penalty system from legal authorities is considered the easiest method to generate compliance (McAdams, 2000), although several reasons have been found to explain why it is not effective in itself (Balliet, Mulder, & Van Lange, 2011). From this perspective, transgressions are motivated by individual profits, but can be deterred by severe punishments. Therefore, control and punishment

by the judicial authorities serve both to punish and to prevent future violations (MacCoun, 1993). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005), individuals´ attitudes are influenced by their beliefs about the consequences of their behavior (behavioral beliefs), so perception of punishment can be a deterrent factor. However, "social control" and "social sanction" are more effective. They refer to any kind of disapproval reaction or punishment that a person might express or exert toward someone who transgresses a social norm (Brauer & Chaurand, 2010; Braur & Chekroun, 2005; Chaurand & Brauer, 2008; Chekroun & Braur, 2002). However, Brauer and Chaurand (2010), Braur and Chekroun (2005), Chaurand and Brauer (2008) and, Chekroun and Braur (2002) have analyzed several factors that limits the power of social control and sanction. For example, the likelihood of people to exercise social control depends on the importance of the social norm that it breaks it, or the implication of the person with the place or situation in which the transgression is taking place.

Besides the importance of the social influence to obey the norms, it is necessary to comprenhed the normative belief systems of a person to analyze their tendency to (non)comply norms. For example, if someone believes that a norm should be fulfilled because it is their duty or a moral standar, they will be more compelling to do it. The belief of a norm as a personal standard or as a moral norm promote normative complaince. These kinds of norms are called personal injunctive or moral norms. Personal injunctive norms are defined as an individual´s internalized moral rules, which guide the approval or disapproval of one´s behavior, beyond the personal and social impact (White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade, & McKimmie, 2009). Personal injunctive norms are independent of the immediate expectations and influences of others, and they are associated with positive emotions, such as pride and joy, and negative ones, such as shame and regret (Manstead, 2000). These standards widely explain why people comply or not with certain norms beyond the specific situation, exceeding above all the cost-benefit assessments (MacCoun, 1993).

Perception of norm´s weakness

The power of norms is closely related to two variables: the relationship between laws and social norms, and the structure and organization of institutions.

Regarding to the first point mentioned above, Fehr and Fischbacher (2004) explain that legal enforcement mechanisms cannot work unless they are based on a widespread consensus about the normative legitimacy of the rules, in other words, unless the rules are supported by social norms. For example, Graeff (2007) explains this tension when he analyzes corruption systems. He argues that corruption cannot be combated only with more penalties or controls

by the government because corruption norms are based on social norms, which represent traditional social practices transmitted and learned by socialization processes. For this reason, corruption rules are mostly considered illegal but the problem is rarely considered illegitimate.

With reference to the second point, political science has analyzed how formal and informal rules coexist in social organization. In recent decades, researchers have debated whether formal institutions alone shape citizen expectations and behaviors (Lauth, 2000). They have agreed that a complete institutional analysis requires including informal institutions as well, because actors respond to a mix of formal and informal incentives and, in some instances, informal incentives triumph over the formal ones (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

Helmke and Levitsky (2004) distinguish between formal and informal institutions. They define formal institutions as "rules and procedures that are created, communicated, and enforced through channels widely accepted as official. This includes State Institutions (courts, legislatures, bureaucracies) and state-enforced rules (constitutions, laws, regulations)" (p. 727). By contrast, informal institutions are defined as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (p. 727).

The characterizations of the relationship between formal and informal institutions tend to fit into two distinct and contrasting categories. One of them assumes that informal institutions are functional as they provide solutions to problems that emerge in social interaction and improve efficiency and/or performance of formal institutions (March & Olsen, 1984). The other one shows that informal institutions are dysfunctional, leading by example, clientelism, corruption and patrimonialism that undermine the functioning of formal democracy, market, and state institutions (Lauth, 2000). However, recent studies suggest a more complex configuration that exceeds the two positions, because informal institutions sometimes reinforce or replace those formal institutions that they seem to undermine (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

Helmke and Levitsky (2004) propose four types of relationship between formal and informal institutions. The first one describes a *complementary* role of informal institutions with effective formal institutions. In the second type, the informal institution accommodates to formal institutions. These kinds of informal institutions create incentives to behave in ways that alter the substantive effects of formal rules, but without directly violating them; they contradict the spirit, but not the letter, of the formal rules (e.g., cooperation between political parties to accept a law). The next two types of institutions refer to ineffective formal rules. In one case, formal rules and procedures are not systematically enforced, which enables actors to ignore or violate them. These informal institutions are

incompatible with the formal rules; if someone follows one, the other is violated (e.g., clientelism, patrimonialism, clan politics, and corruption, etc.). Finally, informal institutions in compatibility with formal institutional outcomes replace formal institutions that are ineffective (e.g., private security).

The last two types of informal institutions are vivid reflections of Argentina's institutions (Beramendi, 2014). O'Donnell (1996) explains that the problem of Argentine political institutions is not the lack of institutionalization, in other words, the lack of formal institutions; on the contrary, the obstacle is that formal institutions do exist but their rules are not followed because it is the informal institutions that guide the actual behavior of people. This means that informal institutions are widely shared and deeply rooted.

This institutional characterization implies weakness in the power of norms. For example, Beramendi y Zubieta (2013) found that in Argentina people tend to reevaluate norms because their compliance almost always depends on the context and situations. As a result, the legitimacy and power of norms is restricted. In addition, Latinobarómetro (1996-2010) systematically found that 84% of Argentineans perceive that their fellow citizens do not comply with norms. Ipsos Mora y Araujo´s research reports that 60% of Argentineans do not believe that respect of the law is a value and 92% think that disobedience is one of the reasons for the poor institutional performance (Herrera, 2004). What is more, in Argentina transgression is such a common and settled practice that the concept of *Argentine transgression culture* was created to describe this functioning (De Biase, 2010; Hernández et al., 2005; Nino, 2005; Puy, 2011; Rossignolo, 2012; Solari, 2010; Transparency International, 2013; Zommer, 2006).

This tendency to illegal practices corrodes the political, economic and social development of the country (Nino, 2005), produces a sensation of social demoralization, and increases the presence of negative emotions over the positives ones (Beramendi, 2014). In this frame, it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive study on normative transgression. The goals of this study are to validate the structure of the Normative System Perception Scale (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014) and to analyze the perception functioning of the normative system in the Argentinean context.

METHOD

Type of Study

A non-experimental and cross-sectional study was performed. A descriptive- correlational study of differences between groups was design (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado, & Lucio, 2006)

Participants

The sample was a non-representative one and it was used a purposive sampling technique. It was consisted of 508 Argentinean participants from seven provinces of Argentina and the Capital City (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Provincia de Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Neuquén, Misiones, Entre Ríos, and Tucumán). The 68.9% were female and 31.1% were male, with a mean age of 32.73 years (*SD* = 11.81, *Min* = 18, *Max* = 78). The 77.6% (n = 394) of the participants work, 64% (n = 252) of them in the private sector, 27.4% (n = 108) in the public sector, and 8.6% (n = 34) work in both areas. The distribution of the educational level of the participants is: 1.8% (n = 9) primary, 8.7% (n = 44) secondary, 10.8% (n = 55) tertiary, 62% (n = 315) university, and 16.7% (n = 85) postgraduate.

Regarding self-perception of social class exposed by the participants, it found that .4% (n = 2) is seen in the lower class, 10% (n = 51) in the lower middle class, 68.9% (n=350) in the middle class, 18.7% (n=95) medium-high and 2% (n = 10) in the upper class. Also, 40.4% (n = 205) of participants self-reported to have a ideological left positions, 42.5% (n = 216) center position, and 17.1% (n = 87) a right one.

Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire with the following scale and socio-demographic data was designed.

Normative System Perception Scale (NSPS, Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014). This scale measures the perception of the performance of the normative system. It is conceptualized as a complex organism comprising the norms, and the institutions and actors who promote, support and control them, as well as citizens´ beliefs and practices with regard to standards. The scale is composed of 20 items included in three dimensions: the perception of lack of legitimacy, the perception of transgression, and the perception of regulatory weakness. Some of the items are: *In this country fair trials are rarely conducted*; *Argentineans always find a way of breaking the rules*; *in institutions there is always a formal route that should be followed, and an irregular path that streamlines processes*, etc. The Likert responses were gathered on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items loading negatively (items 6, 13, 14 and 17) were reversed. Each dimension is obtained by adding the items and dividing that number by its quantity. The total score of the scale is calculated by adding the three dimensions and dividing it by three. High scores reflect the perception of a negative functioning of the normative system. The psychometric characteristics are detailed and analyzed in the Results section of this study.

Sociodemographic variables. Sex, age, self-perception of social class, and political ideology.

Procedure

Data were collected from two complementary modalities - a paper and a digital version - to obtain a heterogeneous sample. For the paper version, institutions and people were contacted and invited to participate voluntarily. The principal researcher contacted public institutions (e.g., Police Station, Ministry of Labor, University) and private ones (e.g., Universities, firms and commercial shops) to collect the information. For the digital version, a document was designed in google.doc to be shared on the Internet. The principal researcher contact different colleagues from different province of Argentina and gave them the link to invite participants to complete the survey. Also, the snowball technique was used to reach a bigger and diverse sample. In the paper version, 375 questionnaires were collected, whereas 133 questionnaires were collected in the digital version. Although this method has been incorporated in recent times, it is recognized as a method equal to or better than in-person gathering self-administered data (Lyons, Cude, Lawrence, & Gutter, 2005), because it increases the speed of data collection, the diversity of the sample, and reduces costs (Weber & Bradley, 2006), diminishes social desirability, the corresponding data loading and procedural errors among other advantages (Lyons et al., 2005).

Before starting the survey, participants signed an informed consent, to comply with the codes of ethical behavior in Social and Human Sciences established by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) of Argentina (Res. DN ° 2857/06).

Data Analytic Procedure

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Normative System Perception Scale with the method of Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation (Ruiz, Pardo, & San Martín, 2010) was conducted using EQS 6.2. To determine the adequacy of the models fit, the Chi-square/DF, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), and the Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were examined. A χ^2/DF value less than 5, values above .95 for the CFI, IFI, NFI, and NNFI, values of .08 or less for the RMSEA indicate acceptable fit (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Widaman & Thompson, 2003).

RESULTS

In the first part of this section, the validation of the structure of Normative System Perception Scale in two phases is presented. In the second part, the descriptive analyzes of the scale are shown.

Phase 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To validate the *Normative System Perception Scale* (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014) structured in three dimensions, a confirmatory factor analysis with the method of Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation was carried out (Figure 1). Based on the mentioned criteria, results showed an adequate fit for NSSP scale, $\chi^2/df = 2.86$, $p < .001$, *CFI*= .97, *IFI*=.97, *NFI*= .96, *NNFI*= .97, *RMSEA*= .06 (CI 90% [.055,.068]) (Hooper et al., 2008). Figure 1 shows standardized parameter estimates in which the regression weighing between dimensions of first order and second order were high (ranks ranging from 58-77) and weighing of the items were acceptable (between .18 to .72) (Hemphill, 2003). The statistical significance of coefficients were established through an examination of the t values and all were significant considering a p-value .05.
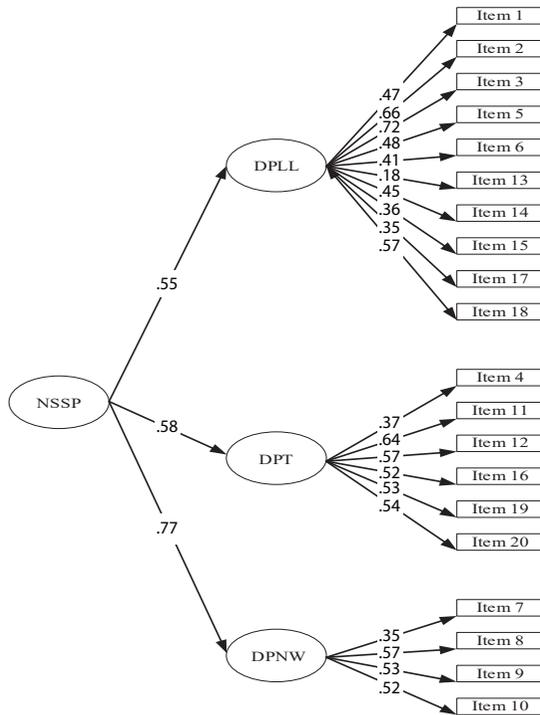

Figure 1. Confirmatory Factorial Analysis of the Normative System Perception Scale
Note: NSPS =Normative System Perception Scale, DPLL=Dimension Perception of Lack of Legitimacy, DPT= Dimension Perception of Transgression, DPNW= Dimension Perception of Norms Weakness

Phase 2: Internal consistency

The reliability coefficients indicated satisfactory levels of internal consistency for the overall scale NSPS (α = .89), as well as for its subscales Perception of Lack of Legitimacy (α= .84, Table 1), Perception of Transgression (α=.84, See Table 2), and Perception of Norms Weakness (α=.62, See Table 3).

Table 1
FACTOR 1 of the NSSP scale: Corrected Homogeneity Index (CHI) y *alpha if item deleted*

	Items	CHI	Alpha
1	In this country, public agencies are inefficient.	.55	.83
2	The authorities do not care to represent the interests of the population.	.70	.82
3	In this country the authorities abuse of their power.	.71	.81
5	In this country fair trials are rarely conducted.	.60	.83
6	People trust their authorities because they are fair and effective.	.48	.84
13	In Argentina, most citizens have their basic needs satisfied	.48	.84
14	In this country institutions are reliable.	.55	.83
15	In this country, justice can be bought.	.46	.84
17	The State distributes wealth and property equitably among its citizens.	.46	.84
18	In Argentinean institutions there is a great deal of corruption.	.56	.83

Table 2
FACTOR 2 of the NSPS: Corrected Homogeneity Index (CHI) y *alpha if item deleted*

	Items	CHI	Alpha
4	People tend to do what is convenient for them when authorities are not controlling.	.49	.83
11	Argentineans always find a way of breaking the rules.	.69	.80
12	People tend to transgress because there is no punishment.	.63	.81
16	People think that they can always break the rules.	.64	.81
19	People think it is normal to break the rules because everyone does it.	.61	.81
20	In Argentina it seems that everyone has their own set of norms.	.49	.72

Table 3
FACTOR 3 of the NSPS: Corrected Homogeneity Index (CHI) y *alpha if item deleted*

	Items	CHI	Alpha
7	In Argentinean institutions, official norms coexist with informal norms, which are recognized and respected by people.	.31	.61
8	Authorities are above the norms of their institutions.	.46	.50
9	In institutions there is always a formal route that should be followed and an irregular path that streamlines processes.	.56	.43
10	In Argentina, many norms are arbitrary and meaningless.	.29	.63

Table 4
Mean differences of NSPS scale and its dimensions according the variable sex

	SEX	t	gl	p	M	DS
DPLL	Men	-4.041	506	.001	5.29	1.14
	Women	-4.041	506	.001	5.69	.95
DPT	Men	-2.282	506	.05	5.20	1.13
	Women	-2.282	506	.05	5.44	1.12
DPNW	Men	-3.416	506	.001	4.77	1.21
	Women	-3.416	506	.001	5.14	1.06
NSSP	Men	-3.944	506	.001	5.09	.97
	Women	-3.944	506	.001	5.42	.84

Note: NSSP =Normative System Scale Perception, DPLL=Dimension Perception of Lack of Legitimacy, DPT= Dimension Perception of Transgression, DPNW= Dimension Perception of Norms Weakness.

Table 5
ANOVA test of NSPS scale according the variable ideological positioning

	Left	Center	Rigth	F	gl	p
DPLL	5.27a	5.64b	6.01c	21.069	2,505	.001
DPT	5.15a	5.38a	5.84b	14.546	2,505	.001
DPNW	4.83ab	5.01	5.28 cb	7.183	2,505	.01
NSSP	5.08a	5.37b	5.73c	13.387	2,505	.001

Note: NSSP =Normative System Scale Perception, DPLL=Dimension Perception of Lack of Legitimacy, DPT= Dimension Perception of Transgression, DPNW= Dimension Perception of Norms Weakness.

[a] In each row, the averages with different superscripts are significantly different according to Scheffe post-hoc test with p <.05.

Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis of the NSPS showed high scores (*M*= 5.32, *DS*= .90, *Range*=6), meaning that participants had a negative perception of the performance of the normative system. The dimension Perception of Lack of Legitimacy had the highest scores (*M*= 5.56, *DS*= 1.03, *R*=6), followed by the Perception of Transgression (*M*= 5.56, *DS*= 1.03, *R*=6), and finally the Perception of Norm Weakness (*M*= 5.02, *DS*= 1.13, *R*=6).

Sociodemographic analysis

As Table 4 shows, women perceived more negative than men the performance of the normative system.

Besides, the variable ideological position was recategorized in three values: left, center and right, being generally a more significant differentiation between groups of left and right, although participants with a center ideological positioning differ from participants with a left and right ideological positioning (see Table 5).

DISCUSSION

The first objective of the study was to assess the confirmatory factorial analysis of the *Normative System Perception Scale*. The results showed an adequate fit for this scale and the reliability coefficients indicated satisfactory levels of internal consistency for the overall NSPS and its sub-scales, thus improving the results of the former exploratory study of this scale (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2014). However, low reliability of the dimension Perception of Regulatory Weakness could be due to the small number of elements containing the factor (Santisteban Requena, 2009; Virla, 2010), and the diversity of features they were intended to evaluate (Loevinger, 1954).

The Normative System Perception Scale reflects a number of social inconveniences. Firstly, the perception of high levels of lack of legitimacy of institutions and their authorities was observed. On this scale specifically, the lack of legitimacy was operationalized as perceived

poor economic distribution and unjust legal processes, high levels of corruption, low efficacy and institutional trust, and presence of authoritarian authorities. According to previous literature, the absence of legitimacy is related to transgression because it declines respect for authorities and diminishes the voluntary compliance of norms (Kluegel & Mason, 2004; Murphy & Tyler, 2008; Tyler, 2000, 2001, 2010).

Secondly, it was observed that participants perceived that transgression is a shared belief, naturalized in the Argentine context, where normative noncompliance becomes a habit, coexisting with low perception of control and punishment, and individual normative systems that guide the behavior of people. This naturalization, together with a perceived widespread transgression, leads one to rethink the concept of norm, to approach a concept of norm from a more complex perspective that integrates a negative facet of the norm, which includes arbitrariness and meaninglessness.

Thirdly, high levels of perception of normative weakness appear related to the perception of double standards of the institutions in which formal and informal rules coexist, the latter being the one people report following. When formal rules are widely perceived as relative, they lose their power and become negotiable. Informal rules are then established by the institutional authorities themselves, which makes these actors more powerful than the institution and its formal processes. Thus, the widespread use of informal institutions, defined as socially shared but generally unwritten rules without official sanction (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004), undermines the formal system and society in general. Although informal norms can supply or supplement the formal operation in certain specific circumstances, they create situations of uncertainty and institutional weakness, because they do not usually replace formal institutions but live side-by-side.

This institutional double standard can be conceptualized as a *phenomenon of normative syncretism* due to the coexistence of rules that have no substantial consistency with each other but are merged into the same system. This configuration of the normative system has become a cultural syndrome in Argentine society.

This analysis reveals a tension between formal rules or laws and social norms. On the one hand, the institutional system provides and regulates laws and norms, and on the other, social norms support and promote noncompliance. In this context, the transgression becomes a descriptive norm.

In this study, women have a more negative perspective of the functioning of the normative system than men. This result is congruent with previous ones (Beramendi, 2014). This more negative perspective could be connected with the tendency of females to be more relationship-oriented than males (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). This quality could explain they focus in the actual functioning of the normative system and transgressor behavior. As regards the normative conducts, some authors affirm that men tend to have more transgressor behavior than women (Boman & Gibson, 2011), and they are more likely to punish (Carpenter, Matthews, & Ong'ong'a, 2004). Another variable that generated differences is the ideological position of the participants. Although the results are not expected, since historically the trend in the literature indicates that people on the left are more critical of the system, these data are consistent with findings from local studies in recent years in which those ideologically to the right are more critical of the government than those who are positioned closer to the left (Arnoso Martinez, Bombelli, Muratori, Mele, & Zubieta, 2013; Beramendi & Zubieta, 2013). This is related to Argentine political context, where the government is considered ideologically left because of their policies and economic measures (Latinobarómetro, 2011).

This paper presents some limitations at instrumental and sample levels. It can be seen that there is some ambiguity or generality in using the terms institutions and norms. In addition, the sample was intentional and included a predominance of women, thus limiting the scope of the investigation. In future studies, it would be interesting to use th Normative System Perception Scale in other countries of Latin America and Europe to corroborate the proposal, to make inter country comparisons, and to expand the study of norms in other contexts.

In this scenario, it is critical to understand that if the perception of the normative system, the high levels of transgression, and the norm´s weakness does not change, the development of society and civility will be eroded, thus undermining the lives of every citizen.

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