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Unpacking the Factors that Shape Trust in the Social System – Jasna Milošević Đorđević, Milica Vdović, *Psychology of (Dis)trust in the Social System,* FMK, 2024.

In what ways are some individual factors connected to social (dis)trust? The book *Psychology of (Dis)trust in the Social System* by Jasna Milošević Đorđević and Milica Vdović, published by the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade, Serbia, provides insight into the predictors and role of (dis)trust in the social system. The analysis is based on findings from fourteen nationally representative empirical studies conducted over the course of seven years (2016–2022), while also emphasizing the limitations of the research. The analysis is enriched with examples of both good and bad practices implemented in the system, as well as data visual representations.

The degree of (dis)trust in 15 to 17 institutions and organizations was most often examined. Overall, the degree of trust in the social system in Serbia remained at an average (medium) level throughout the examined period. Serbian citizens have the most trust in the Serbian Army, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, the education system, and healthcare, while they have the least trust in trade unions, the media, and political parties, followed by government agencies and the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. Interestingly, the degree of trust in the social system was higher during the coronavirus pandemic than in the period preceding it.

The results show that most of the examined sociodemographic variables were not significant correlates of trust, except for: *education* (the more educated individuals have less trust in the social system), *financial situation* (less wealthy individuals have less trust in the social system), and *age* (younger individuals have less trust in the social system). The data also revealed that *ideologies* and *social identities* have a positive relationship with and significance for predicting trust in the social system – those with stronger social identities, and those with a penchant for right-wing political ideologies and traditional values, have greater trust in the social system. The association and predictive power of the *beliefs* and *attitudes* are significant, but the directions of their predictions differ: a negative correlation and prediction (higher scores on these variables are linked to lower trust in the social system) exist with most of the examined beliefs and attitudes: political cynicism, perception of political anomie, conspiratorial mentality, belief in conspiracy theories, and perception of high corruption. However,

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a greater *perception of a just world* and *social justice* leads to greater trust in the social system. *Abilities* (scientific knowledge, media literacy) did not have significant associative or predictive power when it came to (dis)trust in the social system. Finally, the last measured group of indicators (from the category of psychological mechanisms of system justification) showed that *the tendency to confirm the system*, *conflict ethos*, and *orientation toward social dominance* all have a positive association with and positively predict trust in the social system.

Of all the measured behaviors, *electoral participation* is the most strongly and consistently associated with trust in the social system. Electoral participation is higher among people with confidence in the system, while abstainers have no confidence in the social system. During the pandemic, the association between (dis)trust in the social system and compliance with recommended health behaviors to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, including vaccination, was empirically confirmed. However, trust in the social system has less strong, positive connection – it encourages pro-environmental behaviors, while simultaneously increasing social distance.

Authors also stress the importance of various social factors that contribute to the development of institutions – such as *social inequalities*, *the type of political organization of the state* (democratic vs. authoritarian societies), and *the presence of corruption*. Since these factors play a crucial role in shaping (dis)trust, there is significant room for Serbia to improve in order to become a stable, modern, socially responsible country with minimal unresolved corruption issues. The authors transparently acknowledge some of the limitations of their studies: restricted number of psychological and sociodemographic variables; lack of measures for *interpersonal trust toward those closest to an individual*, *the effectiveness of the institutions*, *political party affiliation or membership*. The instruments they used were based on self-statements and self-assessments, and the method was correlational, which limits their ability to draw conclusions about the presence and impact of (dis)trust on the behavior of Serbian citizens.

The beginning of the book is marked by the main findings of the study, followed by an overview of the political and broader social context during the years of analysis in both Serbia and the world. After the first chapter, the theoretical framework is presented, where the authors explore the definition of trust from various theoretical perspectives. The authors also describe individual characteristics of (dis)trust, followed by an exploration of different forms of socially responsible behavior. In the methodological section, the data collection method is detailed, along with an overview of the instruments and statistical indicators used. The analysis and interpretation follow the methodological part, first showing descriptive indicators of general (dis)trust in the system, followed by individual indicators, and then the distribution of psychological predictors of (dis)trust, as well as past, current, and future behaviors. This is followed by correlation and regression analyses (model testing), which first present the sociodemographic correlates of (dis)trust, and then the psychological correlates. The predictors are analyzed in the same order. In the final section of the

results, correlation analysis is used to examine the relationship between (dis)trust and significant past, current, and future social behaviors. The final considerations offer a multidisciplinary interpretation of the analyzed data within the specific time and social context of Serbia. The authors briefly summarize the most significant findings, the importance of the research goal, study limitations, and recommendations for future empirical research, along with potential social strategies for increasing trust in the social system. The book closes with appendices, which include all the instruments used in the research, as well as a list of graphs and tables.

The systematic, theoretical, and empirical analysis of trust in the social system in Serbia over a long period of time makes this study relevant to both the academic community and the broader social public.