

## Crisis, anomie and trust in institutions in Brazil

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### Abstract

*The general purpose of this article is to analyze the interplay of crisis perception, anomie and trust in institutions. Our general hypothesis is that there is a negative relationship between anomie and trust in institutions, and a positive one with crisis perception, anomie and institutional distrust. We carried out two studies to test this hypothesis. The first one was carried out with a sample of children and adolescents and the second with adults. The hypothesis was partially confirmed in both studies. The trust in institutions and anomie were high and negatively correlated, but they did not affect the perception of crisis. We also found that distrust in political institutions was the best predictor of anomie in both studies. The results are discussed considering the risk that distrust of political institutions entails, producing a general disenchantment with the moral and ethical standards of conduct in a society.*

**Keywords:** Anomie; Trust; Political institutions; Crises perception; Democracy.

### Resumo

*O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a relação entre percepção de crise, anomia e confiança nas instituições. Nossa hipótese geral é que existe uma relação negativa entre anomia e confiança nas instituições e uma relação positiva entre percepção da crise, anomia e desconfiança nas instituições. Realizamos dois estudos para testar essa hipótese. O primeiro envolveu uma amostra de crianças e adolescentes, o segundo foi feito com adultos. A hipótese foi parcialmente confirmada em ambos. Os níveis de confiança nas instituições e a anomia foram altos e negativamente correlacionados. Entretanto, eles não afetaram a percepção da crise. Também descobrimos que a desconfiança nas instituições políticas foi o melhor preditor da*

*anomia nos dois estudos. Os resultados são discutidos considerando o papel da desconfiança nas instituições políticas na produção de um desencanto geral com os padrões éticos e morais de conduta na sociedade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Anomia; Confiança; Instituições políticas; Percepção da crise; Democracia.*

## **Resumen**

*El propósito general de este artículo es analizar la interacción de la percepción de crisis, la anomia y la confianza en las instituciones. Nuestra hipótesis general es que existe una relación negativa entre anomia y confianza en las instituciones, y una relación positiva entre percepción de crisis, anomia y desconfianza institucional. Llevamos a cabo dos estudios para probar esta hipótesis. El primero se realizó con una muestra de niños y adolescentes y el segundo con adultos. La hipótesis se confirmó parcialmente en ambos estudios. La confianza en las instituciones y la anomia fueron altas y correlacionadas negativamente, pero no afectaron la percepción de crisis. También encontramos que la desconfianza en las instituciones políticas fue el mejor predictor de anomia en ambos estudios. Los resultados se discuten considerando el riesgo que conlleva la desconfianza hacia las instituciones políticas, produciendo un desencanto general con las normas morales y éticas de conducta en una sociedad.*

**Palabras clave:** *Anomia; Confianza; Instituciones políticas; Percepción de crisis; Democracia.*

## Introduction

- *Waldo has got the attention of the young, and the young don't give a shit about anything except trainers and pirating films.*

- *Do you have any other astounding theory about young people?*

- *Yeah, yeah, I do actually! Look, they care about Waldo. They'll vote for Waldo. The video was a hit for a reason...*

- *Waldo's not real.*

- *Exactly! That's what you said that really hit home, he's not real, but he's realer than all the others.*

- *He doesn't stand for anything.*

- *Yeah well at least he doesn't pretend to do. Look we, we don't need politicians, we'll all got iPhones and computers, right? So, any decision that must be made, any policy, we just put it online. Let the people vote, thumbs up, thumbs down, the majority wins. That's a democracy.*

The above dialogue takes place in the 3rd episode of the second season of the series Black Mirror, "The Waldo Moment". Waldo is a cartoon blue bear, dubbed by a failed comedian, who is embroiled in a plot to criticize traditional politicians. Waldo ends up being voted into political office. The episode clearly depicts the disgust that ordinary citizens, especially the youngest, have for politics and politicians, which ultimately put democracy at risk. We think that something related to Waldo is happening around the world, and particularly in Brazil.

This article is about the distrust of ordinary people for politics and politicians. It analyzes the feeling of anomie that causes a good part of the population to be uninterested in politics, accepting alternatives that may be even more dangerous for the future of the country, like Waldo. The interplay of perception of crisis, national disconnection and distrust of social and political institutions has not been widely studied by social psychologists in Brazil.

In fact, a search carried out in the CAPES Periodical and thesis and dissertation databases (BDTD) in 2019 revealed no study of the relations among crisis, anomie and trust in institutions (Lima, Almeida, Araujo, & Barbosa, 2019). As these authors point out, producing analyses about the consequences of crisis on social disintegration (anomie) in an unequal and conflictive society like ours is an important task, especially in a context in which crises take on aspects rarely seen in other times.

This paper analyzes the relations among, crisis perception and trust in institutions among samples of children/teenagers and adults in Brazil. The data come from two related studies conducted in the same period and using the same questionnaire. The first one was performed with children and adolescents, the second with adults. Our overall hypothesis affirmed there would be a negative relationship between anomie and trust in institutions, and a positive one with crisis perception, anomie and institutional distrust.

## Anomie

The notion of anomie was first introduced by Émile Durkheim in *The Social Division of Labor* (1893), and then in his analysis of suicide in 1897 (DiCristina, 2016). Durkheim (1893/2012) defines anomie as an abnormal and anomalous form of social work division, which produces an absence of adequate social regulation. Anomic suicide, for instance, occurs when social norms and laws are disconnected from the values and beliefs that guide the individual's life (Durkheim, 1897/2000).

Anomie threatens the social regulatory system, producing behaviors that range from conformity to delinquency, such as crimes, suicides, innovations, ritualism, alienation, and rebellion. In psychological terms, anomic individuals lose their sense of continuity or obligations and reject all social connections. In social terms, individuals feel that society and its political leaders are indifferent to their needs, that they do not promote social order, and that social goals will not be fulfilled (Merton, 1938).

In this sense, anomie arises from an interruption of individual motivational integration in relation to the social system. It is the opposite of institutionalization. While this is a set of expectations of realizing roles or social performances to keep the society functioning, anomie is the breakdown of this order: an individual sliding out of the social system's expectations and axiological orientations, a shutdown (Parsons, 1951).

One may think there is an interpersonal integration continuum that varies from *eunomy* (order) to anomie. On the *eunomy* side would be the "integrated self"; while on the anomie side would be "self-distanced from others" or the alienation of oneself (Srole, 1956). This author analyzed the hypothesis that poor social integration (anomie) is associated with social minorities' rejection; whereas *eunomy* implies more positive intergroup attitudes. The results confirmed his hypothesis: the correlations between anomie on the one hand and prejudice and authoritarianism on the other were high. Sigelmann (1981), who found the same results in Brazil, argued that the increase in economic, political and social problems directly impaired the feeling of individual security and group cohesion, intensifying anomie.

Teymoori, Jetten, Bastian, Ariyanto, Autin, Ayub et al. (2016) define anomie as a perception that the social and political conditions in society are crumbling. They developed a scale, the Perception of Anomie Scale (PAS), that considers anomie in its social and political dimensions, as a perception that society has become disintegrated and unregulated: "It is important to note that in this operationalization we measure anomie not as a personal belief or feeling but rather as a reflection of the societal state in individuals' minds" (Teymoori et al., 2016, p. 2). The authors suggest two dimensions of anomie: breakdown of the social fabric (lack of trust and moral decline) and breakdown in leadership (lack of regulation and lack of legitimacy).

The PAS was applied in 28 countries and the results showed that the five with the highest anomie scores were (in this order) Pakistan, South Africa, Poland, Hungary and Brazil, while Canada, Netherlands, Finland, Denmark and Switzerland were the least anomic. Teymoori et al. (2016) found a positive correlation among and the levels of corruption, economic inequality, poverty, and unemployment. According to these authors, in the most current sense, anomie is related to a collective sense of helplessness, insecurity and hopelessness. It is therefore appropriate to inquire about what relations it maintains with crisis and trust in political institutions. Others studies show that the greater the social inequality is, the greater the anomie and greater the search for authoritarian political leadership will tend to be (Sprong, Jetten, Wang, Peters, Mols, Verkuyten, et al., 2019).

## Crisis and Trust in Institutions

Crisis always involves a historical totality, but it is common for analyses to focus only on one aspect or dimension (Brunkhorst, 1996). Although crises feed on objective data, such as economic, administrative and political problems, they are also subjective, since they affect the social sectors in a specific way (Fausto, 1984). Most authors agree that crises in Brazil are more a trait of our political-economic formation than a passing stage in our history (see Lima, Lins, & Monteiro, 2018).

The period starting in 2013, it reached an apex in 2016, and continued in 2017 and 2018, two years when Brazil experienced its most turbulent period since re-democratization in 1985, was marked by intense popular riots that challenged even the idea of social, employee, and political representation. As stated by Euzébio Filho (2019), that crisis period was strongly reflected in the institutional field “in a movement that went from questioning institutionalized entities to denying them” (p. 195).

The recent political and economic crisis seems to have a cyclical aspect, since it has occurred in several countries. Some important elements can be highlighted: the notion of disorder and unrest, which threatens the collective entity; the formation of social chaos and the choice of an enemy - the scapegoat, to be sacrificed and “pay the bill”. The main cause of this crisis is a long-term trend of decline of trust in governments and other political institutions (Volodin, 2019). The crisis regarding political institutions can be understood considering five dimensions: “confidence in the political community (nation-state), confidence in the principles of the regime, confidence in the performance of the regime, confidence in institutions and confidence in political leaders” (Chevalier, 2019, p. 1).

There is ample evidence that many contemporary democracies are experiencing a strong crisis or even dying. The United States was experiencing an era of worsening economic inequality and a growing sense of material vulnerability by the broad working class. This crisis contributed to produce the Donald Trump phenomenon. Trump knew how to feed and exploit the anxiety of white Americans about growing ethnic-racial diversity in the United States. He did this through the demonization of Mexican immigrants, the isolation of Muslims and the crass stereotyping of blacks. The appeal to return America to “Americans” meant that the material well-being and privileged position of whites would be protected above all else and for all (Bobo, 2017).

Western Europe is also experiencing a crisis in political institutions. The European Social Survey Data from 15 countries show a falling trust level between 2002 and 2014. Countries as such Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and France had indexes of trust below the European average. This study also found that lower educational level is associated with minor economic status, reduced political interest and satisfaction with the economic situation, and weaker trust in political institutions (Chevalier, 2019).

Karim (2012), studying the trust in political institutions in Africa, analyzed the Afrobarometer Survey Round data from 20 countries between 2008 and 2009. Using a trust scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 3 (a lot), the author observed that about 63% of Africans have a lot or some trust in the president, 60% trust in the law’s courts, 57% in parliament, and 52% in police forces. Volodin (2019), analyzing the institutional trust in a representative sample from Ukraine between 2005 and 2015, found that the level of trust did not vary greatly over the last years. The Orthodox Church obtained the highest level of trust, with 66% of Ukrainians expressing this trust in 2015, followed by the Army with 61%. The legal system (13.4%) and political parties (12.7%) were the institutions with the lower trust.

In Turkey, using the World Values Survey data from 1990 to 2007, Karakoc (2013) found that the trust in political institutions, including parliament and political parties, declined between 1990 and 2001, and then increased up to 2007. The trust reached 2.67 on a scale that varied until 4 in 1990 but decays to 2.34 in 1996 and to 2.27 in 2001, due the economic and political crises. The same thing happened to the trust in the justice system. The author concluded that a significant jump in GDP, as well as pro-EU policies, democratizing reforms and other factors were responsible for the increased trust. Segovia et al. (2008), using data collected in 2005 from a sample of 996 residents of Santiago in Chile, observed, in a scale that ranges from 1 (no trust) to 5 (much trust), that political parties were the institution eliciting the lowest trust ( $M = 1.78$ ), followed by the regular courts ( $M = 2.11$ ) and the Supreme Court ( $M = 2.23$ ). On the other hand, the police force was the most credible institution ( $M = 3.30$ ), followed by the President of the Republic<sup>1</sup> ( $M = 3.29$ ) and the Army ( $M = 3.09$ ).

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1 Ricardo Lagos at the time of the study,

In Brazil, two wide investigations compared teenagers and adults, using two data sources: The Barometer of the Americas from 2014 to 2017 and a sample of 487 high school students from the city of Campinas (São Paulo state) (Russo, Azzi, & Faveri, 2018). Concerning the general data (Barometer), the authors observed that the armed forces were the institution with the highest credibility, followed by the military police, both for the younger (16-25 years) and the older respondents. Political parties and the National Congress had the lowest confidence rates (average of less than 3 on a five-point scale). This pattern of results was consistent in the two data sources analyzed. The authors also linked trust in political institutions with willingness to support democracy, considering that greater the trust greater the support for democracy. Finally, they found that distrust in political institutions increased between 2016 and 2017, especially among younger people, because the cases of corruption reported by the “Operation Car Wash”.

The IJC-Brazil data (Confidence in Justice Index from 2017) showed that trust in almost all the institutions analyzed declined, the least reliable being the federal government (6%), political parties (7%), National Congress (7%), labor unions (17%) and the judiciary (24%), while the most trusted were the Army (56%) and Catholic Church (53%) (Agência Brasil, 2018). In the same vein, Lima et al. (2017) found that the only trustworthy institution for a sample of Brazilians in 2016 was the family; while political and other institutions such as the police, military, church, and the judiciary presented low confidence averages. According to *Datafolha* (2019), the armed forces were considered the most reliable institution (45%), followed by the public prosecution services (state and federal) (25%), judiciary (25%), National Congress (8%) and political parties (5%).

The proceeded theoretical analysis indicates that the relationship of anomie, crisis and trust in institutions is a dynamic phenomenon that deserves to be analyzed because directly impacts on democracy’s functioning. This analysis is especially relevant nowadays, when the Brazil is crossed by the consolidation of more populist narratives, which started in the streets’ unrests of 2013, that led to impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and culminating in the election of President Jair Bolsonaro.

## Overview of the studies

In two studies we examined the interplay of crisis perception, anomie and trust in institutions. The studies took place between 2016 and 2017, a period of massive dissemination of the crisis fueled by the investigations and arrests resulting from the “Operation Car Wash”. The data of Study 1 was from children and adolescents. Study 2 was conducted with adults. The instrument was the same in both cases. Our general hypothesis was that there would be a negative relationship between anomie and trust in institutions, and a positive relationship with crisis perception on the one hand and anomie and institutional distrust on the other.

### Study 1

In a year and a half Brazil experienced its most turbulent period since re-democratization in 1985. In 2016, a series of remarkable political events occurred: the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff; the removal of Eduardo Cunha, then president of the Chamber of Deputies; the revelations of new corruption scandals by “Operation Car Wash”; and the elevation to the presidency of the then vice president, Michel Temer, whose mandate was immediately marked by reports of corruption, obstruction of justice and criminal conspiracy. Besides these problems, in July 2017, former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was convicted of corruption and jailed in April the following year.

These events were combined with the country’s deep economic recession, with unemployment reaching 12%. This political and economic conjuncture caused more than 3 million Brazilians to take to the streets in 2016 to protest in all 26 states and the Federal District, clamoring for Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment. Demonstrations of support for Dilma Rousseff also occurred in more than 50 cities in Brazil. In this context the data of Study 1 was collected.



## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 186 children and adolescents, students of public schools of (city omitted). The participants' age ranged from 12 to 18 years old ( $M = 15.2$ ;  $SD = 2.07$ ). Those aged from 12 to 15 composed 49.5% the sample and those from 16 to 18 years made up the rest. In relation to gender, 50.3% were female, while regarding skin color, 22.4% (36) were white, 58.4% (94) were brown or mixed-race and 19.3% (31) black, while 25 people did not declare their skin color. Regarding educational level, 63% were in high school (10th-12th grade) and the rest were in 7th-9th grade. The children's monthly family income ranged from 1 to 12.5 times the minimum monthly wage, with average of 1.96 ( $SD = 1.77$ ).

### **Instrument and procedures**

Data were collected through hard copy versions of the questionnaires, filled out in the participants' schools in October 2016. We used the anomie scale developed by Teymoori et al. (2016), called the Perception of Anomie Scale (PAS), translated into Portuguese. It is composed of 12 items, inquiring about trust in other people, cooperation, concern for others, importance of honesty, legitimacy of government, respect for laws, etc. The answers ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). The scale has six items to measure the perception of breakdown of social fabric and another six regarding the perception of the breakdown of leadership. For the analyses, we decided to maintain these two dimensions of anomie. They were positively correlated  $r(173) = .23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . These results are analogous to those found in the studies of Teymoori et al. (2016). The reliability of the PAS was moderate ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ). For the breakdown of social fabric, the Alpha was 0.66 and for the breakdown of leadership it was 0.68.

The perception of crisis was measured by the question "Considering Brazil's current situation, how do you assess the impact of the crisis on your personal and family life?" The scale ranged from 1 (not serious) to 7 (extremely serious). The participants generally assessed the impacts as severe ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ). This value was above the midpoint of the scale (4),  $t(156) = 2.66$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

Trust in the institutions was assessed by asking, "Please tell us your degree of trust in each of the institutions listed below." The list featured 12 institutions; three social (family, church and labor unions), two military (police and army), one juridical (judicial branch) and six political institutions (political parties; federal, state and municipal governments; executive branch and legislative branch). Responses range from 1 (strongly distrust) to 7 (totally trust).

### **Ethical aspects and data analysis**

All ethical principles for human studies provided in Resolution 466/12 were followed. Authorizations from schools and parents/guardians were obtained. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Descriptive analysis**

First, we analyzed the anomie of children and adolescents, considering the two dimensions. Table 1 shows that young people had high scores, especially in the breakdown of leadership dimension. It is noteworthy that children and adolescents agreed on items such as: "People think that honesty doesn't work all the time; dishonesty is sometimes a better approach to get ahead" and "Most people think that if something works, it doesn't really matter whether it is right or wrong." or "People think there are no clear moral standards to follow."

Table 1-Means and Standard deviations of anomie items on each dimension ( $n = 186$ )

Breakdown of social fabric		
Item	Study 1 Means	Study 2 Means
People think that honesty doesn't work all the time; dishonesty is sometimes a better approach to get ahead.	4.31	4.77
Most people think that if something works, it doesn't really matter whether it is right or wrong.	5.07	4.88
People think there are no clear moral standards to follow.	5.01	4.32
Everyone thinks of him/herself and does not help others in need.	4.63	4.64
People do not know who they can trust and rely on.	5.51	5.43
People are cooperative. *	4.14	3.90
General mean	4.78	4.66
Breakdown of leadership		
Politicians don't care about the problems of the average person.	5.86	6.18
Some laws are not fair.	5.36	6.04
The government uses its power legitimately. *	5.49	5.55
The federal government is legitimate. *	5.32	5.52
Government works towards the welfare of people. *	5.18	6.15
The government's laws and policies are effective. *	4.80	5.54
General mean	5.32	5.83

\* *Inverted items*

The participants' general anomie was high, and significantly above the midpoint of the PAS [( $M = 5.05$ ;  $SD = 0.88$ );  $t(172) = 15.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. The same happened for the breakdown of social fabric dimension [( $M = 4.78$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ );  $t(177) = 9.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ] and breakdown of leadership [( $M = 5.32$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ );  $t(176) = 15.25$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. These results indicate the strength of the dimension of mischief in the Brazilian "jeitinho", a logic present in anomie, which can range from creativity to permissiveness and corruption in solving problems or avoiding uncomfortable situations (Akira Miura, Pilati, Milfont, Ferreira, & Fischer, 2019). What is shocking about this result is that it was found even in 12-year-old participants.

Regarding the breakdown of leadership dimension, the results showed a total disengagement of young people in relation to politics, with a high belief that leaders were not legitimate or valid. The trust in institutions was very low, especially for political institutions ( $M = 1.93$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ). That is, on a seven-point scale, the average obtained by these institutions was less than 2, which in semantic terms is equivalent to the answer "I suspect a lot". For all these institutions the average score obtained was below the midpoint of the scale (4),  $ts(166) -22.43$  to  $-15.70$ ;  $p < 0.001$ . Only the family ( $M = 6.17$ ;  $SD = 1.45$ ) and church ( $M = 5.00$ ;  $SD = 1.99$ ) institutions were perceived as reliable by children/teenagers,  $t(165) = 19.29$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and  $t(165) = 6.49$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , respectively. Young people did not trust the police either,  $t(166) = -4.96$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; the judiciary,  $t(167) = -5.49$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and labor unions,  $t(165) = -6.15$ ;  $p < 0.001$ . Regarding the army, participants neither trusted nor distrusted it,  $t(165) = 0.52$ ; n.s. (see Table 2). These results confirm those found by Russo et al. (2018) in adolescent samples, with the only difference being that in our study, the young people did not trust even military institutions.



## Main Analysis

Initially, we tested whether the age of children/adolescents interfered with their anomie scores. For this, we used two age groups (12-15 and 16-18 years old). Age had no effect on anomie in any of its measurement forms: general anomie, breakdown of social fabric and breakdown of leadership,  $F_s(1, 176) < 1$ ; ns. Regarding crisis perception, it was also unaffected by age  $F(1, 156) < 1$ ; ns. In the same way, trust in institutions was not influenced by age,  $F_s(1, 166) \leq 1$ ; ns.

With respect to the relationship of anomie, trust in institutions and perception of the impacts of the economic crisis, Table 2 shows that higher anomie (general, breakdown of social fabric and breakdown of leadership) was associated with less trust in political institutions. The general anomie and its dimension of breakdown of leadership also implied less confidence in social institutions and the judiciary. The perception of the crisis did not correlate with trust in institutions or with anomie. This result is different from those of Volodin (2019) and could be related to the fact that the perception that Brazil is in crisis is so constant that it no longer affects anomie or confidence in the country's institutions. This contrasts with some authors, who associate perceptions of the economic crisis with distrust in political institutions (e.g., Chevalier, 2019). Importantly, trust in institutions correlates with itself in a positive and strong fashion, indicating that distrust in one institution and society can have a chain effect of discredit on all others.

Table 2-Descriptive and bivariate correlations ( $n = 186$ )

Variables:	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1-General Anomie	5.08	0.91	1	--	--	--	--	--	--
2-Breakdown of social fabric	5.35	1.17	.77***	1	--	--	--	--	--
3-Breakdown of leadership	5.22	1.20	.80***	.23**	1	--	--	--	--
4-Crisis perceptions	4.34	1.62	.03	.02	.03	1	--	--	--
5- Trust in Social Institutions (Family, Labor Union and Church)	4.73	1.15	-.19*	-.11	-.16*	-.05	1	--	--
6- Trust in Military Institutions (Police and Army)	3.67	1.72	-.08	-.04	-.09	-.03	.34***	1	--
7- Trust in Judicial Institutions (Judicial power)	2.94	1.88	-.18*	-.04	-.25**	.04	.28***	.48***	1
8- Trust in Political Institutions (Federal, State and Municipal Government, Executive and Legislative power; political parties)	1.93	1.27	-.36***	-.22**	-.36***	.02	.32***	.37**	.51***

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Theories about the social reality construction indicate that the formation of a collective phenomenon depends on how individuals inter-subjectively share the perception of their social world (Moscovici, 2010). It is worrying that young Brazilians, near or above the age to start participating in electoral democracy (16 years old in Brazil), do not believe in the judicial, political and military institutions of the country, and moreover, distrust leaders and feel themselves disconnected from the social structure. This becomes even more serious when we noticed that anomie, a sense of alienation from society, its laws and politics, is strongly influenced by distrust of institutions, in the same direction that Chevalier (2019) stated.

Indeed, in a complementary test using linear regression analysis, with general anomie as the dependent variable and trust in institutions and perception of crisis as explanatory variables, we found that trust in political institutions ( $t = -3.90$ ;  $\beta = -0.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and in social institutions ( $t = -2.05$ ;  $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) explained

15% of anomie variance ( $R^2 = 0.17$ ). That is, the lower the trust in these institutions, the greater the feeling of anomie of the young people.

The set of these results led us to investigate whether this feeling of social and political alienation is higher or lower among adult Brazilians.

## Study 2

The second study was carried out to analyze the relationship of crisis perception, anomie and trust in institutions in an adult sample. The questionnaire was posted on an online platform between December 2016 and October 2017.

### *Method*

#### Participants

Two hundred twenty-five people from 20 Brazilian states, mostly from Sergipe, Bahia, Federal District and São Paulo, participated. They were between 18 and 59 years of age ( $M = 30.6$ ,  $SD = 10.1$ ); 57.8% were female; and 46.8% declared themselves white, 35.3% brown and 17.9% black.

#### *Instrument and procedures*

The anomie was measured again by the PAS scale (Teymoori et al., 2016). The internal reliability of the general anomie was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ). For the breakdown of social fabric dimension, the Alpha was 0.77 and for the breakdown of leadership it was 0.64. These two anomie dimensions were positively correlated,  $r(225) = .23$ ;  $p < 0.01$ .

The perception of the crisis was again measured by the question “Considering Brazil’s current situation, how do you assess the impact of the crisis on your personal and family life?” The scale ranged from 1 (not serious) to 7 (extremely serious). The participants assessed the impacts as severe ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ). This value was above the midpoint of the scale (4),  $t(210) = 7.58$ ;  $p < 0.001$ .

As in the previous study, trust in institutions was assessed by asking, “Please tell us your degree of trust in each of the institutions listed below.” Responses range from 1 (strongly distrust) to 7 (totally trust). The institutions evaluated were also the same as in Study 1.

#### *Ethical aspects and data analysis*

All ethical standards for human studies provided in Resolution 466/12 were followed. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

### *Results and Discussion*

#### Descriptive analysis

Table 1 reports the means of adherence to each item and the anomie in general. As in the previous study, it is noteworthy that participants strongly agreed with items stating that “today in Brazil, honesty is not always the best way”, “we don’t know who we can trust”, and “there are no clear moral rules to be followed.” Similarly, and even more intensely than the children and adolescents in the previous study, there was a perceived collapse of political leadership, a perception that government and law are not legitimate and effective. In fact, the participants’ general anomie was high, far above the midpoint of the PAS [ $(M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = 0.77)$ ;  $t(224) = 24.02$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ]. The same happened for the breakdown of social fabric dimension [ $(M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.09)$ ;  $t(224) = 9.04$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ] and breakdown of leadership [ $(M = 5.83$ ,  $SD = 0.88)$ ;  $t(225) = 31.01$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ].

This disconnect from the social and political system is dangerous because it positively correlates with other broader phenomena such as poverty, pessimism, instability of society, societal unease, collective helplessness and hopelessness and dangerous worldview (i.e., “there are many dangerous people in our society who will attack someone out of pure meanness.”); and negatively with social cohesion, human development and social equality (Teymoori et al., 2016). Anomie is also associated with the desire for more authoritarian political leadership (Sprong, et al., 2019).

Regarding trust in social and political institutions, we observed that only the family was considered reliable by the participants, with a mean score of 5.68, above the midpoint of the scale (4),  $t(224) = 17.49, p < 0.001$ . For all other institutions, confidence was significantly below the midpoint of the scale,  $t(224) -6.28$  to  $-35.48; ps < 0.001$ . These results are identical to others found in national surveys in Brazil (Agência Brasil, 2018; Datafolha, 2019). In our study, the confidence in the political institutions was even lower than in the previous study. The average confidence in the six political institutions was 1.80 ( $SD = 0.90$ ), semantically the answer was in the categories “I totally distrust” and “I strongly distrust” (see Table 3). Unlike children and adolescents, the adults did not even trust the church, differently from other studies (Agência Brasil, 2018). It should be noted that our sample was composed mainly of university students.

### Main analysis

We tested whether participants’ age influenced crisis perception, anomie, and trust in the country’s institutions. For this analysis, we divided the sample into three age groups: 18 to 25, 26 to 35 and over 35 years. Analysis of variance indicated that, regarding the general anomie, there were no effect of age,  $F(2, 209) < 1; ns$ . The same pattern to breakdown of social fabric and breakdown of leadership,  $F_s(2, 209) \leq 1; ns$ . The perception of the crisis also was not affected by age,  $F(2, 209) \leq 1; ns$ . Regarding trust in institutions, the participants’ age has impacted only the trust in labor unions,  $F(2, 209) = 3.02; p = 0.051$ . Participants over 35 years old were the least trusted in this institution ( $M = 2.59, SD = 1.50$ ) (SNK  $p < 0.05$ ). There are no age effects on the others institutions,  $F_s(2, 209) \leq 1; ns$ . Education and income levels did not affect the anomie, perception of the crisis, and trust in institutions, in isolation,  $F_s(2, 188) < 1; ns$ , or in interaction  $F_s(4, 188) < 1; ns$ .

In this study, as in the previous one, the general anomie score and the breakdown of leadership dimension correlated negatively with trust in political, military and judicial institutions. General anomie also implied less trust in social institutions. Unlike the first study, the breakdown of social fabric dimension also correlated negatively with trust in political, social and judicial institutions, albeit weakly (see Table 3). That is, more anomie was associated with less trust in all political, social, judicial and military institutions. Other studies have found that when the trust in political authorities diminishes, the general trust, related to other institutions, is also eroded (Rothstein & Eek, 2009).

As in the first study, the perception of crisis impacts was not related to anomie and trust in institutions. It continued to be an almost immovable feeling, unaffected by the conjunctures in both studies. Again, the trust in institutions was strongly correlated with itself. As in Study 1, we performed linear regression analysis to explain the participants’ overall anomie. In this study, only trust in political institutions ( $t = -5.69; \beta = -0.37, p < 0.001$ ) explained the general anomie; corresponding to 13% of its variance ( $R^2 = 0.13$ ).

Table 3-Descriptive and bivariate correlations (n = 225)

Variables:	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. General anomie	5.24	0.76	1	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Breakdown of social fabric	4.66	1.09	.83***	1	--	--	--	--	--
3. Breakdown of leadership	5.83	0.88	.73***	.23**	1	--	--	--	--
4. Crisis perception	4.82	1.56	.09	.09	.06	1	--	--	--

Variables:	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5- Trust in Social Institutions (Family, Labor Union and Church)	3.99	1.02	-.15*	-.13 <sup>†</sup>	-.10	.10	1	--	--
6- Trust in Military Institutions (Police and Army)	3.24	1.47	-.25***	-.11	-.30***	.05	.47***	1	--
7- Trust in Judicial Institutions (Judicial power)	2.62	1.46	-.29***	-.12 <sup>†</sup>	-.37***	.02	.33***	.60***	1
8- Trust in Political Institutions (Federal, State and Municipal Government, Executive power, Legislative power and political parties)	1.80	0.90	-.38***	-.16*	-.46***	.07	.30***	.33***	.40***

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## General Analysis and Discussion

The general purpose of this article was to analyze the interplay of crisis perception, anomie, and trust in institutions. Our general hypothesis stated a negative relationship between anomie and trust in institutions, and a positive one with crisis perception. This hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Nevertheless, the two studies have data collection methods and were made with different samples, adolescents in one case and adults in the other, we proceeded to a comparative analysis of the data only to raise questions that may be better and more systematically deepened in future investigations. Thus, comparing their results, we observed there were differences in the general anomie scores,  $F(1, 397) = 5.39$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; and in the breakdown of leadership dimension,  $F(1, 401) = 24.53$ ;  $p < 0.001$ . These were greater in adults than in children/teenagers. The breakdown of social fabric scores did not change between the studies,  $F(1, 402) = 1.26$ ; ns. The adults' crisis perception was greater than that of children/teenagers,  $F(1, 367) = 7.94$ ;  $p < 0.01$ . Concerning trust in institutions, some significant differences were observed. Trust in social,  $F(1, 387) = 45.32$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , military,  $F(1, 389) = 6.99$ ;  $p < 0.01$  and judicial institutions,  $F(1, 391) = 3.65$ ;  $p = 0.057$ , was higher in children/teenagers than in adults. No differences were found regarding political institutions,  $F(1, 388) = 2.27$ ;  $p = 0.13$ .

In both studies, trust in institutions and anomie did not affect the perception of crisis. The feeling of crisis seems to be immune to distrust in institutions and the disengagement of social structure. As highlighted by Brunkhorst (1996), the interdependence between system and subsystem spheres makes the analysis of the impacts of crises often inconclusive. Moreover, even in other social, economic and political contexts there is an alternation between periods of prosperity and periods of crisis, which is a basic aspect of capitalist economies (Lyra, 2010).

Thus, the distrust of political parties, which shapes democratic regimes, was related in our study with a more general disenchantment with the moral and ethical standards of conduct. Such a phenomenon opens the flank of democracy to the emergence of populist and authoritarian leaders who erode it from within and destroy its institutions, as has been happening around the world in recent years (see Inglehart & Norris, 2017).

## Conclusions

The present work constitutes as an initial step within Brazilian social psychology in the analysis of the relations of anomie, crisis and trust in the institutions. Social psychologists and political psycho-

logists have not conducted studies in Brazil about these phenomena. Studies of trust in institutions stem almost entirely from reflections from other social sciences, and anomie has received little or no attention. However, these are fundamental themes for understanding and explaining the current expansion of populism around the world, including Brazil, and the risks of such expansion to democratic regimes. The contribution of social psychology would be strategic in this scenario because it can focus simultaneously on group and individual level variables. Another contribution of this article is to highlight the importance of understanding these phenomena as a process, considering samples of adults and children, since the impacts of anomie and distrust in political institutions start affecting people at an early age. As Landau (2018) points out, such a diagnosis can help political parties and other democratic institutions to protect democracy from their most insidious enemies.

Thus, this work also has the potential to provide insights about the social and psychological factors that can motivate the development of extremist groups, leading to the election of figures like Waldo, who are funny and have a destructive rhetoric against politics, but who are just a caricature of leader.

Notwithstanding these contributions, we know that our article has limitations that deserve to be mentioned. One of them refers to the form of data collection. The samples were approached differently, personal application in study 1 and electronic in study 2. In addition, they are not representative samples of the national population. This difference likely had impacts that influenced the results. This aspect should be better controlled in future investigations. In addition, our data were collected between 2016 and 2017, so that changes in the country's political and economic contexts may mean that responses have changed as well. However, as the literature review showed, distrust in institutions was very high, even before the time of the studies, and the anomie of Brazilians may have increased even more from 2016-17 to the present date. These are important issues to be investigated in the future.

We can conclude by saying that, despite the mentioned limitations, the results found in both studies confirm and may go beyond the hypothesis raised of threats against democracies. As Pippa Norris (2017) states, in a comparative analysis of authoritarian populism in Europe and in three Anglo-American democracies (United States, Australia, and New Zealand), there is a significant gap in intergenerational comparisons, the so-called "Millennial generation" (those born after 1980) support less democratic values and institutions than their parents and even grandparents did. The authoritarian populism strengthening and the emergence of the extreme right in Brazil should act as a mirror reflecting the future of societies, stimulating us to respond and confront the limitations of our model of democracy in meeting the aspirations of the population, especially of younger people.

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