

SECOND PART

CHAPTER I PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE MODEL OF SOCIETY, RIGHTS AND VALUES

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I. THE MODEL OF SOCIETY

In defining the model of society preferred by people participating in the poll, respect for the law tops the list of essentials. Placing second is the eradication of inequality, followed by a solution to the scourge of delinquency.

To the question: *“In your opinion, what is the most important goal to achieve in a society?”* 69% answered that first and foremost is ensuring enforcement and respect for the law; 56% indicated that it was important for society to have fewer differences between the rich and the poor; while 50% gave priority to achieving a delinquency-free society. Only 17% mentioned that a democratic society should be the primary goal.

It might be natural to assume, initially, given the unsatisfied material needs of a large part of the population, that the demand to live in a more egalitarian society would be the citizens’ main concern. Issues over impunity and discriminatory use of legislation, however, have made equality in law enforcement the population’s chief complaint. It should also be stressed that a high percentage (83%) do not associate enforcement and respect for the law with democracy, but with issues concerning their safety, making this the people’s primary concern.

An analysis of results based on participants’ level of schooling shows that those with more advanced levels of education tend to place more importance on law enforcement and social justice, and less importance on delinquency. Participants with less schooling not only stress those same two variables, but also that of a delinquency-free society. The importance of having a more democratic society generally received fewer votes, particularly from people in the lower schooling category, the youngest age group and at the lowest socioeconomic levels.

An analysis of the results based on gender showed that men are more concerned about having a society in which laws are enforced and respected than in a delinquency-free, more democratic society; whereas women tend to favor the latter two options.

II. RIGHTS

Citizens in a democratic State enjoy rights guaranteed and protected through instruments used to enforce their observance. These instruments are found in the Constitution and legislation.

Table I. From what you have seen, in our country to what degree can one....?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Have the religion one wishes	91%	8%	1%
Vote for the party one wishes	80%	16%	1%
Meet with whomever one wishes	79%	16%	1%
Associate with whomever one wishes	71%	22%	3%
Study what one wishes	59%	34%	3%
Express what one thinks	42%	48%	4%
Work in whatever field one wishes	25%	52%	14%

Obviously, people recognize that wide religious and political rights are already in place. They also recognize that they enjoy a high degree of freedom for meeting and association. We find, however, more dissent when it comes to their opinion about their satisfaction with the degree of freedom of expression and work that they have. For freedom of expression, 42% say that in Argentina people can always express whatever they wish, while 48% say “only sometimes.” Men (46%) recognize the existence of freedom of expression more than women (38%).

As for educational opportunities, 59% think that the right to study whatever one wishes is always respected, whereas 34% opine that this is the case “only sometimes.” On the whole, this perception is shared by the more educated sectors with a higher socioeconomic status.

With regard to freedom to work in whatever one wishes, only 25% claim that this is “always” the case in the country; 52% say “sometimes,” and 14% say “never.”

Analysis of the poll data reveals that political rights (voting for the party one wishes, meeting and associating with whomever one wishes) are more often answered affirmatively by older, better-educated people with a higher socioeconomic status. In virtually every instance, satisfaction with rights increases proportionally with age; it is the youngest members of society who are the most discontent with their enjoyment of full rights in the country.

Analysis according to geographic location shows that people in large metropolitan areas recognize freedom of expression and meeting. In provincial cities, on the other hand, more people recognize the enjoyment of religious freedom and studying whatever one wishes.

III. OBEDIENCE AND RESPECT FOR THE LAW

Perception of the law as an abstract universal value is extremely positive, and its importance obvious in the eyes of Argentine society. There is a clear tendency to support legality, obedience and respect for legislation. That being said, a large majority of Argentines (83% “very much in agreement” and “in agreement”) consider that obedience and respect for authority are the most important values for a child to learn. This consensus strengthens along with age but diminishes as the level of education increases. An analysis of data according to age range shows that Argentines older than 60 approve of that statement in a greater proportion, accounting for 91% of the positive opinions.

Varying opinions are also seen at different educational levels. The need to instill children with obedience and respect for authority is more important for people who have not finished secondary school (89%) than for those who have gone through high school and beyond, as well as those who assign it less importance (74%). Also, the lower the socioeconomic level, the higher the awareness of the importance of instilling those values on children.

Only 13% disagreed with the importance of this transmission of values. Those most in disagreement were the youngest age groups, those with more schooling, and higher socioeconomic status.

IV. Social Problems and Immorality

The moral issues are ever-present in the minds of citizens. In fact, among the different variables analyzed, Argentines are extremely concerned about honesty, transparency, and morality.

Asked whether they believed that most social problems would be resolved if the country could rid itself of immoral people, 67% of the people interviewed said yes, 26% did not agree, 5% disagreed more emphatically and 4% either gave no answer or did not know what to say.

An analysis of these responses according to the respondents’ levels of schooling and socioeconomic status shows that people with the most formal education and economic resources disagree most with the notion that social problems will be resolved with the disappearance of immoral people. To the contrary, though not by a large margin of difference, the lower the formal education and the fewer the economic resources, the more people agree with the importance of ousting immoral people to solve the country’s social problems.

V. RESTRICTIONS ON PEOPLE’S BEHAVIOR

The Argentine people think that the family must assume most of the responsibility for controlling people’s behavior, more so than the law and the government, giving the family nucleus a predominant role in terms of control.

This conclusion was reached from responses to the question: *In your opinion, who should be responsible for limiting people’s behavior?* As a first option, 55% of the people polled said the family, 29% said the law and 9% the government. Given that the poll offered three answer options, the overall total of all responses confirmed the importance of the family when it comes to limiting people’s conduct. The family accounted for 72% of responses, the law 63%, the government 31% and the Church 10%, among others.

From the overall total of responses, the family appears to be even more important as a behavioral restrainer among women (77%) than among men (67%). There is a sizeable difference among those who believe that the law should place limits, when comparing the responses according to educational level, because the law is far more important to people with more schooling (70%) than to those who did not complete secondary-school studies (58%), and more important even to those with more financial resources.

At low-schooling levels, low-income levels and in the heartland of the country, more people mention the government as an important actor when it comes to placing restrictions. Assigning this role to the Church grows at the very lowest levels of the social ladder and in provincial cities.

VI. EXTENT OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY BEFORE THE LAW

Our research delved into this topic, asking whether or not the respondent was willing to go against stipulations of the law if he felt he was in the right. Whether for convenience sake or personal conviction, it would be desirable for the law and legislative institutions to place limits on any action by an individual.

Hence, the fact that 38% of the Argentines polled claim they are willing to go against what the law stipulates might mean less positive forms of autonomy for society: for example, that the law might be disregarded as a binding structure for a large segment of the population, or that these proponents of individual-autonomy have the social or material means to avoid paying the established penalties if they are caught violating the law.

It might also mean, however, a greater capacity to criticize authority , given prevailing perceptions concerning shortcomings, low credibility, and corruption associated with the operation of many security institutions, attorney activities and administration of justice.

The image of Argentina as an individualistic society with little teamwork spirit or scant collective ties, and limited observance of social norms, is widespread. Undoubtedly, it is a stereotype owing more to social prejudice than to some systematic proof of cultural features. It does, nevertheless, represent a potential point of departure for a more systematic understanding of this phenomenon.

The stereotype assumes the “typical” Argentine to be an individualist in a more negative than positive sense. It is more negative because of a disproportionate focus on the self in lieu of a higher appreciation for creativity and innovation. Consequently, if we accept this stereotype as an initial hypothesis from which to work, an obvious conclusion would be to assume poor compliance with the law and other social cohesion-related characteristics.

Our study sought comprehension of such traits using a set of questions in keeping with the following general formula: “*When you think you are right, are you willing to go against....?*” This general formula was applied to the law, the Church, parents, spouses, colleagues, or friends.

In each case, the trend toward independent, individual behavior is very high, with the exception of the law, for which fewer assertions of autonomy are made.

Table 2. Are you willing to go against...?

	%
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The law	38
The Church	64
Your parents	69
Your spouse	72
Your friends	76

In virtually every case there was an upward trend in the proportion of people who limit themselves among groups of older individuals and at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale.

In an initial calculation, these data suggest that the propensity of Argentines to limit themselves for the sake of informal groups is very low, but it is also relatively low among people who say they are willing to limit themselves because of or for the sake of the law. In the case of informal social relationships, not even do parents appear to constitute a sufficiently influential basis for opinion. The Church, which presumably wields more authority over the opinions of parishioners, is not influential either: two thirds of the people polled opposed the stance of the Church. Law prompts a higher level of self-limitation, since the ratio of those who assert their autonomy against is as low as 38%.

The analysis of the population reveals that males (40%), and those 30 to 40 (44%) are most likely to oppose the law. Of those who said they were not willing to defy the law, people over 60 and women are the most compliant. Performance of the education variable suggests that, the lower the level of education, the greater the tendency to oppose the law.

VII. THE VALUE OF RESPONSIBILITY

The value of responsibility was analyzed from the perspective of attitudes, opinions and, perceptions about public property, as well as respect for the codes for harmonious social living. To this end, we posed the question: *“How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements ?”*:

People treat public areas and property with respect. Fourteen percent (14%) of respondents agreed with this statement; 69% disagreed with it; 16% vehemently disagreed, and 1% did not answer. The fact that citizens recognize public property and spaces as belonging to everyone implies responsibility for that property, and responses seem to indicate that this sense of social responsibility is lacking among Argentine citizens.

People respect standards that are required for harmonious social living. Here also, the results reveal that current levels of citizen responsibility are failing to yield good grades for social co-existence. In fact, 86% of the respondents disagreed or hotly disagreed with this statement. Only 14% agreed with this perception.

People in Argentina respect one another. 90% disagreed with this statement, while 10% agreed.

In our society there is a consensus on what is good and what is bad. Only 18% of the people polled agreed with this statement. Seventy-nine percent (79%) disagreed; 2% did not know, and 1% did not respond.

Responses indicate that Argentine people are generally aware that little responsibility exists in the country as far as treating public property and areas is concerned, as well as basic standards for social harmony and mutual respect. Also, there is hardly any agreement on what is right or wrong. Consequently, citizens have no sense of unity and responsibility.

VIII. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Since freedom of the press is a fundamental value of the democratic system, the Argentines' position with regard to how much control the government should have over the press is important. To the question "*In your opinion, should the government control the press or not?*," 53% were against any control, 40% in favor, and 6% concurred with allowing control on a conditional basis.

Of the 53% against any form of government control of the press, most are citizens with a high degree of schooling and better socioeconomic status. Conversely, those stating that the government should have control over the press, most are people with lesser levels of formal education and a low socioeconomic level. The majority of women incline to be in favor of government control over the press.

IX. TOLERANCE

Tolerance has been deemed one of the key components of democratic principles because it means the observance of a basic norm of democratic life, which consists of free expression of ideas and the acknowledgment of differences.

A country may be considered very tolerant if it acknowledges the importance granting the community the right to express its own opinions, and acknowledges differences. So the rules of democratic life indicate that tolerance and respect for other people's rights are essential values for a society. Disrespect for citizens' rights on account of their sexual preference, level of education, financial situation, etc., is not expected of a society with democratic values. We evaluated the responses of those interviewed as to whether their rights might have been infringed on account of their financial situation, education level, the neighborhood they live in, age, gender, skin color, birthplace or sexual preference.

The responses obtained reflect high levels of tolerance among Argentines and a respect for citizens' rights. Financial situation (37%) and education level (24%) are variables that appear to be influential regarding disrespect for people's rights, a perception upheld mainly by lower-income sectors with little schooling.³⁴ A third influential variable among these same sectors, was residential neighborhood (19%).

Age and gender are, in descending order, follow in the ranking of the most important reasons for which people exhibit some kind of disrespect, albeit to a lesser degree: 16% and 10%, respectively.

Importantly, data from the 2004 Latinobarometer show that, like Argentines, 39% of all Latin American people think that being poor is the main reason why they are not treated equally, and secondly for lacking sufficient education (15%).

³⁴ Coinciding with these data, the document *Aportes para el desarrollo humano de la Argentina de 2002* [Input for human development in Argentina 2002], prepared by the United Nations Development Program, indicates that the chief perception among Argentines is that their rights are breached mainly because of their financial and social condition.